

BOSTON COLLEGE

SPRING 2015

MAGAZINE



Joint ventures

THE NEW CORE PILOT COURSES

Daniel Callahan (music) and Brian Robinette (theology)

PROLOGUE

DREAMERS

The word “curriculum” has been around a good deal longer than have college curricula, and in its original Latin denoted a “race course,” which is wonderful given the pace at which college curricula change. (“The progress of [curricular reform] . . . will be directly proportional to the death rate of the faculty,” said a wise man about 100 years ago.)

According to the record, “curriculum” was first applied to a course of study in a book published in 1576. The volume’s title, as translated from Latin, is something like: *Peter Ramus’s Regius Professorship, that is, The Seven Liberal Arts, set forth by him [in his position] on the Regius [royal] teaching chair in the demonstrative style of instruction and published by John Thomas Freige fully illustrated “in continual tables” for the public use of all interested in the Ramean philosophy.*

In fact, whether it was Ramus who first repurposed “curriculum,” or someone coasting on the great man’s name, is today a serious question, given that the occupant of the Regius Chair happened to be a Huguenot in Paris during the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of 1572, at which time he was removed from his study and then this world by a Catholic mob. Could he have left a completed manuscript that would be published four years later?

Yes, and absolutely not, say the experts. But in the context of curricula, this seems entirely apt, given that dispute has from ancient Athens to our post-modern moment characterized the conversation about what studies ought be undertaken (and which not) on the way to becoming educated.

The most comprehensive account of that long argument that I’ve been able to turn up is *The Liberal Arts Tradition: A Documentary History* (University Press of America, 2010).

Over the course of 496 large-format pages (not including index) the book offers selections from thinkers ranging from Plato to the University of Chicago philosopher Martha Nussbaum (who thinks well of Plato), with stops in between at many of the usual stations (Seneca, Aquinas, Charles Eliot, Robert Hutchins, etc.) and with sidetrack excursions to sites not as often visited.

For examples:

- The self-justifying *Historia Calamitatum* (The Story of My Misfortunes), by Peter Abelard (1079–1142), in which the author recalls his adventures as a student of some of the world’s most acute theologians, the curricular conflicts and fashions of the day, and—very importantly—his own supe-

riority to his teachers, his fellow students, and, ultimately, those who thought him brutish for enjoining an affair with his gifted pupil Heloise, said to have been 20 years his junior (her age remains a matter of conjecture).

- An 1869 letter by Mary Fairfax Somerville (1780–1872), in which the self-taught mathematician and physicist, whose papers were much admired by the Royal Society but could only be presented to its gatherings by her husband, contends (as do her spiritual descendants to this day), “As a source of happiness as well as of intellectual strength, mathematical science and classical learning ought to be essential branches of study” for women.

- The twinned contentions from 1903—“Industrial Education for the Negro,” and “The Talented Tenth”—essays by, respectively, Booker T. Washington (1856–1915) and W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), in which the two men argue over whether the free American Negro was better off taking up a carpenter’s square or a liberal arts degree. It was a practical as well as an ideological debate, as are so many curriculum battles—and as is its distant cousin, our time’s unending spat about whether a liberal arts education ought to provide access to a higher tax bracket or an improved soul (or both at the same time).

But if contention is a hallmark of curriculum history, so is imagination, or “the perpetual dream,” as David Riesman and Gerald P. Grant titled their 1978 study of curriculum reform movements at 3,000 American colleges and universities. “The campus,” they wrote, “has been a kind of dreamscape for utopian as well as practical reformers, some projecting their notions of an ideal community on the curriculum and extra-curriculum, and others seeing the diversity of undergraduate experience as an epitome of the American dream that education can change one’s life. . . . Those yearnings, so ingrained in a nation that believes deeply in a second (and often a third) chance for everyone, are never fulfilled but endlessly renewed.”

And right there is the poignancy that’s attached to the endless building and rebuilding of curricula—a tone of all-too-human hope that confers a certain gallantry even upon the ideological tussles, the tendentious (or worse, lifeless) committee reports, and the hours spent resolutely reconsidering ideas worn thin by human beings who have been worrying the same fabric for about 2,500 years that we know about.

Our story on the core renewal pilot program and its faculty’s hopes begins on page 14.

—BEN BIRNBAUM

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ON THE COVER: Assistant professor of music Daniel Callahan (left) and associate professor of theology Brian Robinette, who will teach tandem courses this fall as part of the pilot renewal of the core curriculum.

Photograph by Gary Wayne Gilbert



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EDITOR

Ben Birnbaum

DEPUTY EDITOR

Anna Marie Murphy

SENIOR EDITOR

Thomas Cooper

INTERIM ART DIRECTOR

Keith Ake

PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

Gary Wayne Gilbert

SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Lee Pellegrini

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Zachary Jason '11

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

William Bole

BCM ONLINE PRODUCERS

Ravi Jain, Miles Benson

SUPPLEMENTS EDITOR

Maureen Dezell

INTERNS

Samantha Costanzo '15, Alexandra Rae Hunt '17,

Andrew Skaras '15

Readers, please send address changes to:

Development Information Services
Cadigan Alumni Center, 140 Commonwealth Ave.
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467
(617) 552-3440, Fax: (617) 552-0077
bc.edu/bcm/address/

Please send editorial correspondence to:

Boston College Magazine
140 Commonwealth Ave.
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467
bcm@bc.edu

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Please direct Class Notes queries to
Class Notes editor

Cadigan Alumni Center
140 Commonwealth Ave.
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467
email: classnotes@bc.edu
phone: (617) 552-4700

LETTERS

CURTAIN CALL

Re "Dramatic Stress," by Michael Blanding (Winter 2015): I was excited to read about Tina Packer's work with the drama students at Boston College. Ms. Packer is a formidable artist, and her passion and skill as a teacher are beautifully communicated. I'm certain her dynamism, ferocity, and insistence on greatness left an impression on every student. Special kudos to the theater faculty for bringing in Ms. Packer and continuing to find ways to inspire the community.

Tony Taccone '72
Berkeley, California

The author is the director of the Berkeley Repertory Theater.

INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE

Re "Foreign Correspondence," by Jeri Zeder (Winter 2015): Any recent graduate who studied Middle East politics will clearly remember Professor Kathleen Bailey and her relentless efforts to bring the region closer to students. I was delighted to read about her latest experiment—designing a course around video conferences with female university students in Saudi Arabia. As an undergraduate, I spent a semester in Egypt and a summer in Kuwait. Yet it wasn't until a fellowship year in Oman following graduation that I began to see the nuances of gender in the Middle East. The new course introduces this opportunity into the classroom, and it is exciting to think how such an experience will influence students' research, as well as create a stronger foundation for cultural exchanges and work opportunities.

Dorothy Ohl '09
Amman, Jordan

As an alumna who has been researching women's rights in Saudi Arabia and working with different women's organizations in Riyadh, I was proud to learn that Boston College has introduced a seminar that sheds light on this crucial but understudied issue. Portrayals of Saudi women

are often one-sided, cast in stereotypes and misrepresentations. The direct impact of Professor Bailey's approach of giving students a chance to hear directly from Saudi women can be seen in the lessons that the students learned, such as appreciating the diversity among Saudi women and reflecting on the American female culture as well.

Dania Rashed Al Humaid '13
Riyadh, United Arab Emirates

During her summer seminar in Kuwait on "Politics and Oil," Professor Bailey encouraged students to "live like the locals" to better absorb and understand other viewpoints. Similarly, while I was writing my thesis on Afghanistan, Professor Bailey encouraged me to partake in a pen-pal program she arranged between students at Boston College and Balkh University in Afghanistan. These exchanges taught me how to build bridges between my own culture and drastically different parts of the world. I am confident Professor Bailey's pupils will graduate with skills they need to work in challenging international environments.

Diane Bernabei '14
New York, New York

The author works with Afghanistan's Permanent Mission to the United Nations.

GREEN SPARK

Nostalgia kicked in sharply when I got to Page 47 of the winter edition of the magazine ("Rooted," by Samantha Costanzo '15) and saw the 1950s photograph of the march of the gumdrop version of the linden trees beside the halls of St. Mary's and Bapst and up to Gasson. I was a boy when that picture was taken, and a frequent visitor to campus because my father's cousin, Joseph R. Walsh, SJ, was the "Reverend Father Rector" of the Jesuit community. My brothers, Mark and Robert, and I were altar servers for "Father Joe" for all manner of family remembrances in St. Mary's Chapel.

Looking at the photograph today, I recall thinking then how dark, almost foreboding, Linden Lane was in the early morning as we made our way to the chapel and how much brighter when we left for home several hours later.

Tom Mulvoy '64
Medfield, Massachusetts

HALLMARKS

Re "Workhouse," by Ben Birnbaum (Fall 2014): Green beer is associated with my first memory of More Hall. I was a sophomore, using the Law School library for a course I was taking on business law. It was March 17, 1968, and on a table inside the entrance sat a keg of beer appropriately dyed for St. Patrick's Day. Whoever supplied the beer assumed everyone in the library was of graduate student age. It was a very pleasant afternoon of research.

Little did I know that More Hall would play a significant role in my life later on. In 1994, I took a position in Human Resources, which was located on More's third floor, and I spent the next 18 years there. The building's original layout of classrooms and faculty offices meant our office arrangements were unconventional, but the ever-present hum of activity, plus the occasional barbecues, brought employees, faculty, and students together in true community spirit.

Bernie O'Kane '70, M.Ed.'72, MA'05
Boston College

The writer is director of the Office of Employee Development.

I joined the Law School in the fall of 1968 when it was still located in More Hall. I often worked late and would stop in to see Robert F. Drinan, SJ, the school's dean. He was a fascinating presence, full of life and ideas, and I always went out into the night with some new perspective and enthusiasm.

I was struck by the photo of the cafeteria, which was generally packed with students, staff, and faculty and helped to foster the strong sense of community that made working in More Hall so rewarding. In 1974 the Law School moved to the Newton Campus. Life was easier in Newton with a newly renovated facility, verdant landscape, and plenty of park-

ing. But I returned often to the environs of More Hall simply to feel closer to the Boston College I had known.

John Flackett
Stratham, New Hampshire

The author is professor emeritus and former director of international programs at the Boston College Law School.

THE RELIGION BEAT

Re "Gulf Wars," by William Bole (Winter 2015): The journalists invited to speak at the Boisi Center's forum "Writing about Religion in a Polarized Age" are distinguished religion writers, but I hope the organizers will invite news reporters who cover religion to a follow-up gathering. Rod Dreher and Sarah Posner, talented as they are, write about religion from specific political viewpoints. Mark Oppenheimer's excellent weekly column in the *New York Times* is more reportage than opinion, but it's still a column.

In the Boisi forum, Oppenheimer seems to have been put in the position of defending "mainstream media" values. I'm glad he was there to do so. But I strongly disagree with his assertion that religion coverage today is "way too soft." Such criticism ignores the large (if, sadly, shrinking) group of news reporters who cover the God beat at U.S. newspapers. I'm sure members of the Religion Newswriters Association—one of American journalism's oldest professional organizations—would welcome a chance to come to the Heights to discuss the state of daily religion journalism.

Tim Townsend '91
Washington, D.C.

The author, a former religion reporter at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, is news editor at Timeline.com.

MARCHING FORWARD

Thank you for Zachary Jason's splendid article "Being There" (Winter 2015). The trauma that Leo Haley, then a graduate student in the School of Social Work, experienced in Selma did not diminish his commitment to working with, as Pope Francis says, "those on the margins." Sadly, Leo's life was cut short after he returned to Boston as a street worker.

However, his legacy lives on in Haley House, the Catholic Worker house in Boston that was named in his honor.

Neil Hegarty, MSW'60
Belmont, Massachusetts

ON ARRIVAL

It was fitting that BCM published a photo of the 90th birthday celebration in the Cadigan Center for our Chancellor, J. Donald Monan, SJ. When Fr. Monan became President in 1972, Boston College was in recovery mode, and I was executive director of the Alumni Association. Three weeks after his arrival, the Association presented a conference for alumni board members and leaders from classes and nationwide chapters. Fr. Monan attended all the presentations, sat in the front row, and asked many questions. At the concluding dinner, he gave an inspiring speech, thanked all for their loyalty, stressed their importance, and eloquently laid out his vision for the University.

John F. Wissler '57, MBA'72
Londonberry, New Hampshire

RATING WARS

Re David Twomey's letter in the Winter 2015 issue: There is no question that voting procedures for the NCAA Football Champion for the 1940 season were highly flawed. I and several others have always believed that National Championship belongs to Boston College. Perhaps the adoration of 8-0 Minnesota had something to do with the spell cast a few years earlier by Bronco Nagurski, a bulldozing runner on offense and a bone-crushing linebacker on defense. The nation and its sportswriters were in love with Nagurski, who by 1940 was playing for the Chicago Bears and making headlines. In my book, Boston College's 11-0 record beats Stanford's 10-0 and Minnesota's 8-0. To reduce Boston College to No. 5 ranking [as the Associated Press did in 1940] perpetuates a gross injustice.

Robert R. Hannan '60
Long Beach, California

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Lipden Lane

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CAMPUS DIGEST

The College of Arts and Sciences has been named in honor of **Robert J. Morrissey '60, H'14**. The senior partner in the Boston law firm of Morrissey, Hawkins, and Lynch, he is a longtime Trustee (1980–2014), benefactor, and since 1981 the chair of the Board's Committee on Investment and Endowment, during which time the University's endowment grew from \$18 million to more than \$2.2 billion. ✂ Thomas Keady, the University's vice president of governmental and community relations, joined the 30-person board of directors for Boston 2024, the organization promoting Boston's bid to host the **Olympics**. Keady, whose athletic interests are undeclared, will serve alongside Larry Bird, Michelle Kwan, and David Ortiz. ✂ Marissa Marandola '16 was named a 2015 recipient of the **Harry S. Truman Scholarship**, which is awarded to students who have shown a commitment to public service. Marandola, a political science major with minors in American studies and management and leadership, is a Gabelli Presidential Scholar. Another Gabelli Scholar, Isra Hussain '17, won a U.S. State Department Critical Language Scholarship, which will fund her study of Urdu in India this summer. ✂ The online finance site WallStreetOasis.com ranked Boston College seventh in its survey of the "top 50 undergraduate institutions for **Wall St. recruiting**." ✂ A team of five undergraduate gamers made it to the final-four round in the **Heroes of the Domm**

tournament sponsored by the makers of the video game *Heroes of the Storm*. The event, which drew more than 889 teams from colleges throughout North America, offered the winning group more than \$350,000 in tuition money. No such luck for the Boston College contingent; they lost in the semifinals. ✂ The University announced a \$956 million budget for the 2015–16 academic year. The plan includes a 3.6 percent rise in the cost of **tuition** (to \$48,540) in tandem with a 5.9 percent increase (to \$109.6 million) in needs-based financial aid. ✂ Students in the writing seminar "Food and Culture Writing," taught by Lynne Anderson, lecturer in English and author of *Breaking Bread: Recipes and Stories from Immigrant Kitchens*, spent an evening in the Lyons Hall kitchen under the supervision of Dining Services staff, **preparing a meal** of ingredients they had been researching. Among the creations that would receive passing marks from Digest: crostini topped with blood orange-cilantro salsa, bacon, and seared scallops. ✂ After leading the nation in goals (37), assists (44), and points (81), women's ice hockey forward **Alex Carpenter '16** was awarded the Patty Kazmaier Memorial Award given by the USA Hockey Foundation to the nation's top female NCAA Division I player. Carpenter, who was also voted Hockey East Player of the Year, is the first Eagle to win the award. ✂ Applications for the **Class of 2019** increased by 27



IN SYNC—Sixteen student dance groups performed under the main tent in O'Neill Plaza on April 24, during the 2015 Boston College Arts Festival. From left are members of the hip-hop troupe Synergy: Christine Zaccaro '16, Lois Park '16, Vincent Talamo '17, Aerin Marshall '17, Thien Dam '15, Samantha Johnson '17, Taylor Forst '15, and Ilee Cojuangco '15. The three-day festival also featured music (a battle of the bands; the Madrigal Singers), theater (*The Tempest*; the musical *Legally Blonde*), comedy, art shows, and readings of original works by students, faculty, and alumni.

percent over last year, the acceptance rate declined to 28 percent (a drop of six points), and for the first time all acceptance and rejection notices were delivered by email. ✂ Associate professor of the practice of economics Can Erbil delivered this year's "**Last Lecture**," recounting personal life lessons, two involving cars (one resulting in his marriage). ✂ School of Theology and Ministry professor **Thomas Groome** was appointed director of the University's Church in the 21st Century Center. ✂ Jeffery Byers, an assistant professor of chemistry, has received a five-year, \$655,000 **CAREER award** from the National Science Foundation. It will support Byers's research into the catalytic synthesis of a new class of biodegradable polymers and also help fund a summer science program for high schoolers that

Byers developed with chemistry department colleague Eranthie Weerapana. ✂ To cope with the winter's snowfalls, which began with Juno, ended with Octavia, and amounted to a record **108.6 inches**, the University deployed 1,062 tons of road salt along with 50 tons of bagged ice melt; workers also moved 60,000 cubic yards of snow to a "snow farm" established on a Brighton Campus practice field. ✂ With her rendition of Britney Spears's "Baby One More Time," English and film studies major Wynn Murphy '18 took top honors at **Sing It To the Heights**, the event formerly known as BC Idol. The evening raised \$6,350 for the music programs at the St. Columbkille Partnership School in Brighton. ✂ Professor of history **Robin Fleming** was named a fellow of the Medieval Academy of America, and phys-

ics professor David Brodio was elected a fellow in the American Physical Society. ✂ On National Signing Day Boston College football added **26 new players**, 15 of whom live within a five-hour drive of Alumni Stadium. ✂ International studies and political science major Thomas Napoli '16 and history major Olivia Hussey '17 were elected **president and vice president**, respectively, of the Undergraduate Government of Boston College, capturing 1,486 of the 3,411 votes cast. ✂ Assistant professor of mathematics David Geraghty was awarded a Sloan Research Fellowship in support of his work on algebraic number theory. In the past three years only three **mathematics departments** have received four or more Sloans—MIT, with six, and Princeton and Boston College, each with four.

—Thomas Cooper



Bradshaw: New studies on financial analysts are "less damning and a little bit complimentary."

Trade show

By William Bole

Carroll School research conversations are faculty-wide

In a conference room on the top floor of Fulton Hall, Carroll School of Management associate professor of accounting Mark Bradshaw is presenting his research before colleagues from a broad swath of management disciplines, ranging from finance and marketing to operations management and information systems (all of which have their own departments in the school). "Some of you are aware of what analysts do, but not all," Bradshaw acknowledges, referring to financial analysts and their projections, the surprisingly contentious topic of his presentation. He frequently steps away from a large screen in the front of the room to get closer to the roughly 50 faculty members in attendance. Most are seated at tables lining the walls; others are behind them, standing or in chairs. All have been dipping into plates of Chinese food delivered from a nearby restaurant.

On that Wednesday in mid-April, the professors had turned out for the

Bartunek Faculty Research Forum, a three-times-a-year event launched in 2010. These are invariably standing-room-only occasions, featuring a single Carroll School faculty member and his or her research projects. They are intended to celebrate scholarship in general, but also to promote a particular approach to scholarship that thrives on cross-disciplinary conversation.

"It's about building a research culture," says Carroll School dean Andy Boynton, alluding to this and similar initiatives at the school. "It puts research here in the spotlight, and for us it's also a way of building community."

Boynton recalls that when he first arrived at Boston College, as dean, in 2005, the nearest thing to a faculty-wide research discussion was a brown-bag-lunch affair, usually lightly attended, mostly by a handful of junior professors, and not necessarily about research. It was customary for the dean to deliver a

message to the group, on sundry matters. Boynton let those gatherings wane and, five years ago, introduced a structured series of faculty research seminars, lunch provided. He did so together with faculty including Jean M. Bartunek, RSCJ, an expert on organizational change and a prolific scholar in her field. Three years ago, the dean announced the series would be named after her.

The forum is designed to be friendly to the non-specialist. As an advisory sent out by the organizing committee says, "The presentation is meant to be intelligible to all, not just those in the faculty member's own discipline." Recent speakers include marketing professor (and past Hillenbrand Distinguished Fellow) Kathleen Seiders, who last November 12 presented on "Motivating Customers to Adhere to Expert Advice in Professional Services: A Medical Service Context," a study which she and her coauthors published as two papers in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* and the *Journal of Service Research*.

Associate professor of information systems (and McKiernan Family Faculty Fellow) Gerald Kane spoke—to a strong turnout of faculty in the midst of last February's snowstorms—on his "overall research stream," that is, the use of "social media to create and manage knowledge."

BARTUNEK CONTINUES TO SERVE as chair of a seven-member committee to promote faculty research conversations in a variety of ways at the Carroll School. Her office, on Fulton's fourth floor, is a crowded intersection of folders, journals, and books (with titles such as *Organizational Change and Redesign* and *Errors in Organizations*), and on off the shelves that scale one wall.

"A lot of schools have a research culture, but the researchers go off on their own" or talk only with others in their field of expertise, Bartunek says. These days, hardly a week goes by without a couple of research-oriented events scheduled at the school, typically featuring an outside speaker. Most are sponsored by individual departments, but to spread interest beyond them, Bartunek's committee has devised an email digest called "Research Conversations." It is sent out

weekly, listing seminars planned for the following week.

Talks this past spring included "Credit Ratings: Significant Issuer Disclosure and Optimal Screening," given by the University of Michigan's Uday Rajan (sponsored by the finance department); and "Competing in New Markets and the Search for a Viable Business Model," with Rory McDonald of Harvard Business School (sponsored by management and organization). Each "Research Conversations" installment begins with the italicized words: *In the spirit of increasing academic conversations and cross discipline pollination, please note that research seminars listed below are open for faculty-wide attendance.*

Among other efforts, Bartunek's committee steers professors to services such as ResearchGate, a professional networking site for scientists and other researchers. Bartunek herself posts regularly on the site, she says, striking up scholarly conversations with people in her network. "They're like friends on Facebook," she explains.

ON APRIL 15, THE RESEARCH CULTURE was in flow at the Bartunek Forum, in Fulton's top-floor Lynch Center. Bartunek brought the group to order, then Bradshaw, clad in black jeans and a dark sweater, launched into an hour-and-15-minute talk dealing in particular with financial analysts at major brokerage firms and their forecasts of corporate earnings. He made clear at the outset that these analysts, who supply stock recommendations as well, have been widely criticized, often ridiculed, over the past decade or so. "The big takeaway from the research is basically negative," he said, displaying on his screen titles of studies and articles in the press. Among those were "Wall Street Analysts Are Useful After All: Just Buy What They Hate Most," a blog item posted this past January by independent market analyst Pater Tenebrarum.

As Bradshaw related, "the rap" against analysts is that their projections are usually overly optimistic about earnings. There are conflicts of interest, too, according to many, one of these being the tendency of corporations to reward analysts for their optimism, in the form of invest-

ment banking business provided to their brokerages. After cataloguing the assessments, Bradshaw interrupted himself and invited attendees to cut in with questions any time.

Joy M. Field (associate professor of operations management) voiced her understanding that the analysts are "paid a lot of money to hype the company stocks that they want to hype," currying favor with corporate managers. "Partly so," Bradshaw replied, indicating his conclusions would be somewhat nuanced. "I don't think the research, where it's going, will say that they're angels."

In a light, conversational tone, Bradshaw reviewed various empirical models for evaluating earnings forecasts. He also related his own findings that analysts are more accurate, less optimistic, when forecasting revenues, as distinct from earnings that are harder to predict because of the different ways of calculating them. This suggests, Bradshaw said, that the "inherent difficulty" of forecasting earnings is one factor behind the well-known inaccuracies.

But the strongest factor, he said, is a complex "interaction" between the difficulty of forecasting and the fact that analysts are "motivated" by their incentives to look on the bright side. In other words, genuine uncertainty makes it easier for them to reason their way to an optimistic scenario, without conscious bias. Bradshaw explained that his conclusion rests partly on the notion of "motivated reasoning," broached more than two decades ago by the late social psychologist Ziva Kunda. He noted that some new research is "less damning and a little bit complimentary" of the way analysts perform their difficult tasks. (His working paper, "The Interactive Role of Difficulty and Incentives in Explaining the Annual Earnings Forecast Walkdown," co-authored with Carroll School assistant professor Lian Fen Lee, and Kyle Peterson of the University of Oregon's Lundquist College of Business, is under review by a journal.)

At the conclusion of the presentation, a number of faculty lingered, chatting in small groups about "optimism calculations" and related points. ■

Identity, please

By Michael Blanding

During Fiction Days, a novelist encourages student writers to endow their characters with cultural roots

On the day he arrived at Georgetown University as a freshman in the mid-1990s, Dinaw Mengestu threw some books into a bag and left campus, searching for a coffee shop where he could fulfill his fantasy of being a writer. After several hours walking the streets of Washington, D.C., he had to admit to himself that he was lost.

"I finally found a 7-Eleven and got a Slurpee, and wrote on a park bench like that's where I was supposed to be all along," Mengestu told a group of students around a conference table at Boston

College on a rainy afternoon. "Later on it seemed like a metaphor for writing. You begin with a strange sort of confidence and then you end up lost and alone and try to find your way back to where you thought you were going."

Mengestu was on Boston College's campus April 8, for a talk that evening as part of the Lowell Humanities Series. He sat down beforehand for informal conversation with some 20 English and African and African diaspora studies (AADS) students at 10 Stone Avenue, home of the Institute for the Liberal Arts, which, with

the English department's Fiction Days and AADS, cosponsored his visit. Mengestu is the author of three beautifully spare novels about immigrants and immigrant identity in America. In 2010, he was named to the *New Yorker's* list of 20 fiction writers under 40 who would be "key to their generation," and in 2012 he was chosen a MacArthur "Genius" Fellow.

As the rain dripped on the pine trees outside the window, Mengestu opened up in an hourlong conversation about the search for his own identity as a novelist. "The process of writing a novel sounds incredibly daunting," observed a student, who identified herself as a writer of short stories. "Can you think back to your first experience writing a novel?"

"I'm so daunted by the idea of writing in general, I didn't want to say I was a writer even when I was doing an MFA," Mengestu confessed. "I found ways of trying to avoid naming this strange task of wanting to tell stories." Born in 1978, Mengestu came to the United States from Ethiopia when he was just two years old, settling in Peoria, Illinois, where he had a "super-American childhood, with hot dogs and picnics and church and baseball." As a teenager, he said, he tried on different identities—black, Ethiopian, African, Ethiopian-American—but none of them seemed to fit.

During that fine arts master's program at Columbia University, he took his first stab at writing a novel about a group of friends in a Midwestern town. "I managed to create a bunch of characters and strip them of all possible identity—they were not black, they were not white," he told students. "I didn't want to write a novel that ran the risk of belonging over *there*, with *those* books."

"I've been wondering how culture plays into your writing," said another student, who continued, "there was one time when I actually finished a short story and I had no idea what I wanted my character to look like and so I played it safe and made her like me—how has that sort of played out for you?"

"It's a huge part," he said. "Sometimes I feel like we are uncomfortable naming the cultural identities of our characters because we feel like it is going to somehow isolate them from other people. I think our task as writers is not to strip our characters of any of those things, but to find out how rich they become, the more dimensions we give them."

After his first manuscript was rejected by countless agents and publishers, said Mengestu, he again found himself wandering down the street in Washington, when a name popped into his head: Sepha Stephanos. Suddenly, he found himself

writing a new book about an Ethiopian immigrant in D.C. who'd fled the "Red Terror" uprising in the 1970s and settled, eventually, to run a grocery store in a neighborhood of the city going through gentrification. Published in 2007 as *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, the book was hailed as a quiet masterpiece, tracing the main character's observations as he wanders the streets, caught between living his new life and remembering those whom he left behind.

By embracing the cultural identities of his characters, said Mengestu, he made their suffering accessible. "The loneliness of an immigrant is the loneliness of every other human being out there, it's just more dramatic," he told students. "You'll walk into a lot of rooms in your life where you will feel lonely. The important thing is that breakthrough where you can see someone on the other side of the table who really sees you."

That struggle for connection across cultural divides pervades his most recent novel, *All Our Names*, published last year, which follows the journey of a bookish Ethiopian refugee from Uganda's civil war in the 1970s, as he is introduced to Midwestern America by Helen, a young social worker. Mengestu writes alternately from the young man's and Helen's points of view, as each strives to create an identity beyond their respective pasts. The main character doesn't have a consistent name, instead taking on a series of nicknames as he sheds countries. "Part of the struggle of the narrative is... for them to define who they are and how they see themselves," Mengestu answered when one of the students asked why he made that choice. "It happens a lot, especially in college, where you get these questions like, Where are you from? Who are you? People are eager to cast you into these singular solutions. I think our identities can be and perhaps should be much more fluid and much more layered," he said, to nods around the table.

Later, Mengestu took his themes and characters to Devlin 101, where he spoke and read in front of a standing-room-only crowd. ■

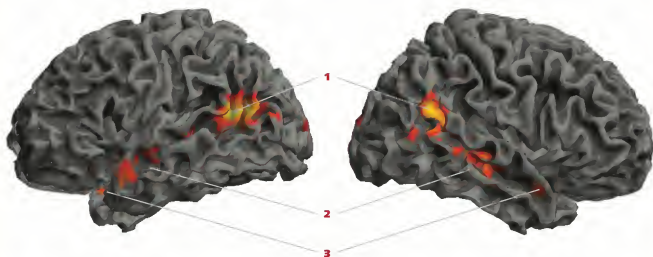


Mengestu: "The loneliness of an immigrant is the loneliness of every other human being out there."

Michael Blanding is the author of *The Map Thief* (2014).

LEFT HEMISPHERE

RIGHT HEMISPHERE



A composite view of 22 children's brains exposed to comic videos.

CLOSE-UP: PUNCH LINE

In 2011, Jessica Black, a neuroscientist and assistant professor at the Boston College School of Social Work, began her research, with colleagues at Stanford University, into how children process humor. Studies had been made for the past decade or so of the adult human response to a joke—using newly developed fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) technology, which registers increased blood flow to active regions of the brain. Black was among the first to investigate children's sense of humor in this way.

In one study, she asked 22 children, ages six to 13, to watch a series of 96 randomly ordered video clips (four to 16 seconds long) while being scanned in an fMRI machine. The clips were divisible into three categories, as identified by a separate, pretest group of children: One third were humorous—for example, pets performing tricks, in the vein of *America's Funniest Home Videos*; another third were neutral, e.g., nature scenes; and the remaining third were deemed enjoyable but not funny—scenes of dirt biking, say, or gymnastics.

The above images are composites of

the tested children's left and right brains responding to funny videos in the moment when they get the joke. On either side, in orange and yellow [1], is an active temporo-parietal junction (TOPJ), a cognitive structure that, among other functions, resolves gaps between expectations and reality. If a man in a video is walking along and he trips, blood levels rise in the TOPJ of the viewer. Red areas [2] and [3] are cognitive areas excited to a lesser degree. Deeper in the brain, and not visible here, is the mesolimbic dopamine system (MDS), which produces rewarding emotions in reaction to stimuli. (In the case of humor, the rewarding emotion is mirth.) Both the enjoyable and funny clips activated the MDS—and the TOPJ, as well. But funny videos triggered an inordinate response in the TOPJ, suggesting the region is crucial to having a sense of humor. These results are almost identical to past brain imaging studies of adults, leading Black and her colleagues to conclude that two-step humor processing (cognition, then emotion) is "characteristic of normal development."

Another finding: In a post-viewing survey, the younger participants expressed

a stronger liking for the funny clips than did the older children. Perhaps, say the researchers, young children "are less expectant" of the "rewarding component" of humor and more caught up in the surprise than older children are. The funny clips mostly employed "protohumor" (bloopers, pratfalls); studies show that all ages favor jokes "just outside of comfortable cognitive mastery," say the researchers.

The researchers also had the same participants take IQ and personality tests. The higher the participant's IQ, the more the humorous stimuli activated both the TOPJ and MDS. Shy children were least moved by the funny stimuli.

Using the same videos, Black and her colleagues conducted a follow-up study of mixed-gender sibling pairs. Humor sparked significantly more brain activity in the girls, specifically in the amygdala, an almond-shaped region that regulates assessments of importance (key to reacting to danger, say, or to the presence of food). In post-test interviews, boys and girls alike revealed they associate much more closely with their father's sense of humor than their mother's. These findings support a theory of humor dating back to Charles Darwin—that male attempts at comedy provide women with a "fitness indicator" for pairing.

—Zachary Jason



UP FRONT, FROM LEFT: John Lapointe '15, Pat Fei '18, and Goebel during a concert on March 13.

Mash-up

By Andrew Skaras '15

The Heightsmen choose their repertoire

Shortly after noon one day in mid-December, baritone Andrew Babbitt '15 walked down the short hallway of an Ignacio Hall suite and poked his head into the last door on the left. As president of the Heightsmen, the University's all-male a cappella ensemble, the red-headed Babbitt was hunting for Harrison Daubert '15, a tenor who was in danger of sleeping through the group's semi-annual song selection meeting, about to take place. Minutes later, Daubert—clad in a comforter, looking a little groggy—joined nine Heightsmen (of the group's 13) in the suite's common room.

Twice a year—usually in December and April—the Heightsmen meet to refresh their repertoire of 20-plus songs for the following semester. Although a few songs survive from year to year—the Temptations' "My Girl," for instance, has been part of the act for more than two decades—the ensemble has a policy of retiring the songs on which seniors are

soloists. This means that 10 or more songs are replaced each year.

In advance of the gathering, each member submits two or three possible replacement tunes, which the group listens to in the common room on a laptop connected through a 25-year-old Sony amplifier to a pair of discount speakers. The discussion after each song is freeform and rapid-fire—often little more than a round of one-liners ("this is pretty sweet," "I'm not sure it brings much," "mmm," "wow, that's beautiful," "I'm not going to defend that"). Members will vote, argue, and vote again. On this gray, snowy day, with 23 titles under consideration, the group planned to select five new pieces.

Founded in 1990, the Heightsmen are the second oldest (after the coed Bostonians) of the University's eight a cappella groups. Certain songs, such as Van Morrison's "Brown Eyed Girl" and Marvin Gaye's "Sexual Healing," always seem to make the performance list, along

with "Good Old A Cappella," the group's theme song, which by tradition includes a solo from the president ("and there standing under the light, / I just see them every night / singing that good old a cappella"). They also try to work in at least one song that showcases each of the group's four musical parts—first tenor, second tenor, baritone, and bass—ensuring that all performers spend time in the spotlight.

First to pitch a song this day was sophomore Owen Lyons, a Vermonter with a desire to add more traditional numbers—akin to the group's perennial "Danny Boy." He proposed "Oh Shenandoah," a melancholy 19th-century folk song ("Away, I'm bound away 'cross the wide Missouri"). Lyons, whose deep voice is well-suited to the song, also suggested the gospel tune "I'll Fly Away," from the *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack. "I've always thought we should do more barbershop. This is an upbeat one," he said.

In putting forward his submissions, the group's music director, David Goebel '16, had kept solo opportunities in mind. His first song, "Cater 2 U," a 2005 ballad performed by Destiny's Child, would make "a natural duet, which we don't really have," Goebel said as Beyoncé's silky voice played in the background. "This is a call-and-response duet, . . . [an] R&B song, so only a three-chord arrangement."

Goebel chose his second song, Usher's "DJ Got Us Fallin' in Love," to bolster what he called the "contemporary-crowd-pleaser" contingent on the Heightsmen's set list. A dance song with a throbbing beat, it would give the group more options at wedding receptions and birthday parties, he said.

The universally hailed standout of the afternoon's offerings came from Michael Mastellone '18, a dark-haired tenor known within the group as Frankie (a nod to his New Jersey roots). He pitched a 12-song, 1980s medley—from the Swedish hard-rock band Europe's "The Final Countdown" to Boston's "More than a Feeling"—that he had already arranged. "It's literally just 30 seconds of each [song]," Mastellone said before the sound system could be teed up—"just enough for people to be like, 'I know that song' and 'I know that song, too.'" His effort drew whistles of praise along with questions

about what he does with his free time ("This" was his response).

Very shortly into the medley, Babbitt huddled quickly with Goebel, then halted the music. He suggested that with such a finished piece in hand they should vote immediately on it. There was nodding all around, and Mastellone's creation was accepted unanimously. "Great arrangements," Babbitt said, before asking Mastellone to work with Goebel and "cut it down to a performance length."

In no particular order, pitches from other members followed, ending, as the session began, with Lyons proffering another classic, the jaunty 1925 "Yes Sir, That's My Baby." "It's very upbeat... has tight harmonies," Lyons said. "It's what people want from an all-male a capella group."

The members then opened their laptops and voted—by emailing Sean Spata '16, who was seated on a couch in the same room. In the first round, each Heightsman could choose seven songs (no voting for your own submissions). Spata announced the tally.

With zero votes, "I'll Fly Away" was dropped, and 10 other songs quickly got the axe (including "Yes Sir, That's My Baby," DJ Got Us Fallin' in Love," and "Cater 2 U").

A run-off followed: Spata circulated a list of 12 songs, from which members were to select the five "winners." A "Thinking Out Loud"/"Let's Get It On" mash-up proposed by Spata won hands-down with 10 votes; Bill Withers's R&B song "Just the Two of Us" (eight votes) also made the cut, as did Mark Ronson's 2014 single "Uptown Funk," after a final plea from Goebel ("we don't have any upbeat songs. You look at all the gigs we do, and we need this kind of song"). Unable to reach a consensus on which of the remaining songs to discard, the group decided to take seven songs instead of five, including "Shenandoah."

With the list set, Goebel handed out assignments for the arrangements, teaming veterans with new members. He said he wanted half of every song done by New Year's Eve and the whole song completed before January 11, the end of the Christmas break. Rehearsals would begin on the 11th. ■

Mind the gap

By Dave Denison

Why blacks don't catch up

In recent courses dealing with civil rights, Taisha Sturdivant, JD'16, and Alvin Reynolds, JD'15, were struck by the way major legal advances often are followed by some measure of undoing. Comparing notes on what they saw as "rollbacks" in voting rights law and affirmative action, the two hit upon an economic metaphor. "We said, 'Wow, that looks like a recession—an equality recession,'" Sturdivant recalled. That was the spark for a panel discussion they organized at Boston College Law School on March 18 called "Civic Engagement in an Equality Recession."

Speaking to about 75 people in Room 120 in the East Wing, three panelists offered widely diverging ways of looking at equality—focusing especially on race—yet each shared the premise that the advances set in motion in the 1960s have been interrupted. Catharine Wells, professor of law at Boston College, was joined on the panel by Tom Shapiro, pro-

fessor of law and social policy at Brandeis University, and Damell Williams, president of the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts. The panel was moderated by Susan Maze-Rothstein, JD'85, a professor at Northeastern University School of Law, and cosponsored by the Jesuit Institute, the Law School, and Boston College's Black Law Students Association.

Professor Wells opened the discussion with a personal story. She told of growing up in a small New England town that had, as far as she knew, only one African-American family. Recounting this years later to an African-American colleague, she confessed to the belief that black families had no interest in settling in such areas. Her colleague urged her to read *Sundown Towns*, a book by historian James Loewen that detailed the methods used in many northern towns to exclude black residents—a revelation to Wells.

Bringing the point closer to our times,



FROM LEFT: Law School dean Vincent Rougeau, Maze-Rothstein, Wells, Williams, and Shapiro.

she detailed the ways in which a system of biased standardized testing has impeded racial equality in higher education—including, she said, at law schools. “We know that African-American students are underrepresented in our student body,” she said. But why? She pointed to problems with excessive reliance on LSAT scores, which produce “significantly lower scores for African-Americans.” “We need to question whether or not the LSAT has anything to do with merit, whether it has anything to do with your qualification to practice law,” she said. Touching on the “long and storied history” of IQ testing and standardized tests (drawing examples from Stephen Jay Gould’s *The Mismeasure of Man*), she suggested that built-in “cultural assumptions” can lead to ranking methods that discriminate against minorities. “Being responsible requires that we learn more about our racial history and how it shapes our modern world,” Wells said.

Williams gave an overview of changes in voting rights law. Drawing on material from a booklet called “Protecting Minority Voters,” produced last year by the National Commission on Voting Rights, he detailed efforts throughout the United States to discourage or intimidate people from voting.

The commission gathered evidence at 25 state and regional hearings held around the country in 2013 and 2014. Williams suggested that legislatures have used gerrymandering to dilute the voting strength of minorities, and have created new “voter ID” laws that are meant “to disenfranchise voters.”

The report sprang out of concern that such measures are now easier to put in place, due to the Supreme Court’s 2013 ruling in *Shelby County v. Holder*, which allows states with a history of racial discrimination to change voting laws without the federal clearance that was originally required by the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Restrictive voting laws are most common where there are more blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans, said Williams. “America does everything to keep us from voting rather than encourage us to vote,” he said.

Shapiro began his remarks by noting his interest in “narratives about racial

equality”—and his intention to propose a competing, more troubling story. One story, he said, is that in the 1960s a social movement was able to win changes in civil rights laws. “And we’ve seen the results—some awfully good results.” But since then those advances “have been worn away at the edges . . . by lack of vigilance, by not understanding what was happening, by legislative intent, and by court challenges.”

Shapiro described a “liberal paradigm” that he asserted “doesn’t get us very far at the end of the day.” It’s a story about opportunity, resting, he said, on the idea that making strides toward equal education, voting rights, and political representation will reduce inequality.

“We also need to be asking the question,” Shapiro said, whether, when it comes to blacks and whites in the United States, “equal achievement and merit return roughly equal rewards. And the answer is, profoundly, no.” Drawing partly on research he and coauthor Melvin Oliver published in their 1995 book *Black Wealth / White Wealth*, Shapiro explained how vast the difference is between blacks and whites when you look at asset wealth. The median white family, he said, has about \$110,000 worth of total wealth, while the corresponding figure for black families is \$7,000—a ratio of nearly 16

to 1. What makes the data more striking, he said, is that when researchers equalize factors such as level of education—comparing white families with a college degree and black families with the same achievement—it doesn’t change much.”

One explanation for different financial gains among college graduates, he said, is that those who do not come from well-off families tend to support other family members. It’s harder to get ahead when you’re not already ahead. But Shapiro said the persistent inequality—more extreme in the late 1980s than in the late 1990s, but growing again in the recent decade—can’t be understood without understanding the structural pervasion of the racial wealth gap. “There is something very deep, very embedded in American society that goes far beyond equal access,” Shapiro said.

Discussing the panelists’ remarks afterward, Sturdivant said she was especially struck by the wealth gap Shapiro described. “I’ve always been a proponent of education, education,” she said. “I hadn’t realized that just simple access to education, that doesn’t necessarily equalize things. There’s so many other factors that come into play.” ■

Dave Denison is a writer in the Boston area.

Funny, tragic, true

By Patrick L. Kennedy

Dennis Lehane’s three rules for storytelling

A writer from Dorchester walked into an elegant function hall on March 11 and found 250 Boston College alumni and students waiting to hear him speak. “This is a strange place to find myself in,” he said.

That’s how Dennis Lehane, the writer, recommends starting a story. Don’t begin with “static description,” as he put it, “like describing this room”—that is, Gasson

100, where Saint Patrick wins over the High King in soaring stained-glass windows. No, get right to it, Lehane said: “Jimmy and Mickey walked into a bar, and there was a guy with a parrot on his head.” That’s the way he learned as a lad, listening to the yarns of the Saturday regulars in the Dot Ave. (Dorchester Avenue) barrooms where his father brought him when they should have been at the farm-



Lehane, on growing up in his Dorchester neighborhood: "It was storytelling as blood sport."

ers' market. ("My mother always wondered why it took us three hours to pick out a few parsnips," he recalled.)

"It was storytelling as blood sport," said Lehane, author of *Mystic River* (2001) and other gritty novels. Starting with the action was the first rule. The next was "be funny—because they were working-class stories, so they were usually going to be tragedies." The stories would end in loss or defeat for the teller—despite the odd futile-revenge coda, Lehane added, reverting to the accent of his youth: "But then a week later, I keyed his cah!" Finally, the story had to be true, even if the precise facts were fluid. If the narrator always came out on top, his listeners called bull.

Those lessons, Lehane told the Boston College audience, served him well as he evolved from a bookworm in a tough Boston neighborhood to the Los Angeles-based, internationally best-selling author of 11 novels, three of which—*Mystic River* in 2003, *Gone, Baby, Gone* in 2007, and *Shutter Island* in 2010—have been adapted into award-winning motion pictures. A writer as well on HBO's now-concluded series *The Wire* and *Boardwalk Empire*, Lehane was touring to promote his new book, *World Gone By*, third in the historical-fiction trilogy that began in 2008 with *The Given Day*, which was set in Boston at the end of World War I. Part of the Lowell Humanities Series, Lehane's talk

in Gasson was sponsored by the Gerson Family Lecture Fund.

The 49-year-old appeared loose and happy to be in front of a "hometown crowd," as he called it. "I can say this because I'm one of you: Bostonians are all just a little bit short of a six-pack." During a Q&A, a question from a Danvers federal prison guard elicited stories about Lehane's brother, a guard at the Walpole state prison. And at the mention of an unnamed bar in Dorchester, an audience member called out, "The Blarney Stone!" Lehane responded mock-dismissively. "No! Wrong neighborhood! Crazy talk!" (The bar, he would reveal, was Vaughan's, a mile or so further down the street.)

As much as he learned about storytelling in those saloons, it was the fear of ending up working in one of them that drove Lehane to realize his dream of becoming a professional writer, he said. After years of getting picked on for his love of books, the young Lehane couldn't countenance a lifetime of cracks like "Hey, Steinbeck, bring me another Bud."

Lehane's parents were Irish immigrants with limited education. The only books in the house were from a multi-volume encyclopedia, evidence that "Dad didn't see the salesman coming," Lehane quipped. But the youngster found a world of books, and inspiration, in the Boston Public Library: "What a library says to a kid from the

wrong side of the tracks is... 'You matter. You matter just as much as the kid whose parents drove up here in a Bentley. You have just as much right to that book, to this knowledge.'"

The author made his debut in 1994 (he was 29), with *A Drink Before the War*, which introduced private detectives Patrick Kenzie and Angela Gennaro (they figure in six of his novels) and hinged on Boston politics and a missing, larcenous cleaning lady. It won the Shamus Award for best first detective novel and launched his career. Yet for years afterward, Lehane's father persisted in calling his son whenever Boston Gas was hiring or the Post Office was holding exams. Then the author sold the film rights for *Mystic River* to Hollywood veteran director Clint Eastwood. "My mother greeted this news in the tone of voice that told me something I never wanted to know: that my mother was attracted to Clint Eastwood." His father, on the other hand, had no idea who Eastwood was. ("Was he in *Bonanza*?") The scope of the accomplishment led the elder Lehane at last when he saw a *Mystic River* billboard looming over I-93.

While the film was shooting in Boston, Lehane brought his parents to meet the director. "My mother loses all power of speech," Lehane recalled. "Meanwhile, my old man's telling Clint how much his movies have meant to him over the years... Clearly, I got the storytelling gene from my father."

Shortly before the book signing, a young man asked, "Is it frustrating to write a book and then see what the filmmakers did to it?"

"It's always weird," Lehane allowed. "However, I've had three really good adaptations." And in each case, he said, the director withstood studio pressure to change the ending. "At the end of the day, you don't want them to get the letter of the book, because then you'd have a 10-hour movie. You want them to get the spirit."

Still, Lehane said, "I know that some day, someone is going to do a crappy job adapting one of my books... It's the law of averages. Just ask F. Scott Fitzgerald." ■

Patrick L. Kennedy '99 is a writer in Boston.

SHAPING THE CORE

Eighteen faculty have paired
up for a fresh approach
to the common curriculum

THIS COMING FALL Boston College will begin piloting a renewed core curriculum, unveiling nine semester-long offerings for freshmen that apply an interdisciplinary lens to contemporary social problems and perennial questions about the human condition. Three are courses that will utilize team teaching, with faculty from divergent disciplines working side by side—a sociologist and an ecologist, for instance, teaching “Global Implications of Climate Change.”

The pilot initiative, the first core renewal since 1991, will in six cases also introduce a lesser-known approach, which John Rakestraw, director of the University’s recently established Center for Teaching Excellence, refers to as “tandem teaching.” This involves faculty members teaching separate courses with overlying topics to a shared group of students. One such coupling will be of courses in music and theology, focusing on aesthetic and spiritual “exercises,” ways of contemplation that spring from art and faith.

The three team-taught courses, grouped under the heading of “Complex Problems,” will each enroll 80 students. The six pairs of linked courses will enroll 19 students and will address what the planners call “Enduring Questions.” The pilot courses will be optional for first-year students, who will also have the opportunity to meet their core requirements through extant programs. At Boston College, about a third of the courses most undergraduates will take are core courses.

“It’s a renewal, not a radical reconstruction,” University provost David Quigley says of the changes underway. “It’s taking what we value in the core, and making it better.” One key value, he says, is “integrated learning,” which aims to help students draw connections between courses and use the learning to shape their lives and callings. As one example in the extant core, Quigley cites the PULSE program, which combines public service experience with coursework in both philosophy and theology.

Quigley adds that the core revision comes partly in reaction to accelerating specialization in academe, with long-recognized disciplines splitting into fields and subfields. (For instance, it’s grown increasingly hard, he says, for someone studying in his own field of 19th-century U.S. history to “stay current with the literature” on other framings of the period.) A goal of the renewal is to compel students to step back and see the whole.

Formal discussion of the core renewal began in the fall of

2012. At the time, Quigley (then dean of Arts and Sciences), Carroll School of Management dean Andy Boynton, and Institute for the Liberal Arts director Mary Crane spearheaded a yearlong series of campus discussions on the future of the core at Boston College. They did so, uncommonly, with assistance from a global design and innovation consultancy, Continuum, headquartered in West Newton. The company is best known for developing consumer products (most famously, the Swiffer mop and the Reebok Pump athletic shoe), but its teams spend much of their time helping institutions to choreograph the conversations and shape the processes that will lead to innovation. From such discussions at Boston College came the dual framework of “Complex Problems” and “Enduring Questions.”

In February 2014, Gregory Kalscheur, SJ, then a member of the Law School faculty (and now interim dean at the newly renamed Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences), began to lead a 15-member faculty task force to help prepare the way for pilot program development. In light of the Jesuit liberal arts tradition, Kalscheur speaks of a distinction between merely teaching the material and, more significantly, “teaching the person.” He explains, “You’ve got to master the material. But the question is also: How does the material help this person better understand how to live in the world?”

The new courses knit together several learning experiences. For example, in addition to three class meetings each week, the co-taught “Complex Problems” courses will include weekly small-group lab sessions led by graduate students that might engage in research, practical projects, and other ventures on campus or elsewhere; they will also include weekly one-hour evening sessions that promote reflection and additional learning, often with guest speakers. The seminar-style “Enduring Questions” classes are designed to offer similar extra-classroom opportunities.

Like their peers at other universities, Boston College students often see their core requirements as “something to get out of the way,” in the words of Quigley, or as an obligatory “gateway to their major,” as Kalscheur puts it. But Quigley says that one of his hopes for the renewal is that a decade from now, students as well as faculty will “decide to join our Boston College community because of the reputation and substance of our core curriculum.” He expects the University to devote perhaps three years to testing a renewed core, with growing numbers of piloted courses and first-year students taking them during successive years.

The following conversations with the nine pairs of piloting faculty are drawn and adapted from introductory videos made for the incoming Class of 2019.

—William Bole



Video profiles of the new core offerings may be viewed via Full Story, at bc.edu/bcm.



Maxim D. Shrayer



Devin Pendas

PENDAS: No problem in the world poses the question of what it means to be human quite like genocide, because genocide is not simply about killing people, but about destroying humanity, as Hannah Arendt put it.

SHRAYER: We're teaching history. And we're teaching issues of culture and ethics. How is it that some people who committed murders during the Holocaust were highly educated, "cultured" individuals who loved music, loved their children and wives, and recited poetry?

PENDAS: It sounds strange to say this, but genocide is profoundly ambiguous. From an ethical standpoint, murdering millions of people is obviously wrong; but if that is self-evident, why do so many people do it? How do the perpetrators come to perceive it as being just, moral, and necessary? Through a series of case studies, we'll look at the core features of genocide—the driving dynamics, the politics, the economics, the ideology and psychology. What has genocide meant for survivors? For perpetrators?

SHRAYER: We start with World War I and the Armenian

GENOCIDE AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

Devin Pendas
associate professor of history

Maxim D. Shrayer
professor of Russian, English, and
Jewish studies

genocide, which is the beginning of modern genocide. We'll learn how genocide is experienced in real time and in recaptured time, in photographs, documentary footage, memoirs, witness depositions, in a poem on an execution of thousands, in fiction.

PENDAS: Students will do some of their assignments in groups, because it's helpful to work through this material with friends. It's a topic in which they will confront the best and the worst in humanity.

The worst is obvious, but there are questions of rescue, survival, resistance, and justice-after-the-fact. The students will keep a journal in which we will ask them to reflect.

SHRAYER: What I'm hoping is that students don't come out of this course with just a new baggage of knowledge—but that they come out armed against a certain proclivity to think that genocide is somebody else's story. Part of their learning experience is to master this story, to make it their own. Their journals are a way of recording their experience and the experience of experiencing.

PENDAS: That's a nice way of putting it.

SONG: We humans have always defined ourselves in relation to what we're not, and Nature is what we're not. Even when we're extolling it, Nature is something separate from us. Yet our ideas of Nature keep changing, and that keeps putting pressure on our sense of what it means to be human. In 18th-century literature there's an assumption of human agency. Robinson Crusoe can reinvent his whole society stranded on an island. Moving into the 19th century, and especially the 20th century, you begin to see worlds where humans are never as in control as they want. You've got Freud telling us that our motivations are being controlled by the unconscious, and Darwin saying we're descended from animals. The line between animals and humans starts to break down.

VANDE WALL: Right. Coming out of a philosophy and history of science background, I keep thinking about how the way the universe looks to us—how we think it works—defines us. When we start believing that Copernicus is right

HUMANS, NATURE, AND CREATIVITY

Min Song
professor of English

INQUIRING ABOUT HUMANS AND NATURE

Holly Vande Wall
lecturer in philosophy

and the Earth goes around the sun, what does that say about where we fit?

SONG: In the Aristotelian world, the idea was that Nature is there for our use, but there was also a kind of complexity, a kind of soul. And then Descartes comes along, and a being is either human or like a machine, with no in-between. You and I both grew up in the Midwest with the consequences of that thinking. All around us the land had been divided up into square mile blocks,

to be sold off to settlers. Nature was an empty space upon which you could just . . .

VANDE WALL: Draw things! Aldo Leopold said, You can draw square grids on the map all you like, but the truth is the land has contours. And if you plow in straight lines, the soil's going to run downstream. Nature doesn't work on gridlines. And neither do humans, because maybe we are more natural than we think. We're going to examine these persistent questions: What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to be natural?



Holly Vande Wall



Min Song

CALLAHAN: The idea behind aesthetic exercises is that we will look not just at aesthesis—how we apprehend the true, the beautiful, and the good—but also at the process of apprehending. Many people expect they can just stand in front of a work of art, or hear a symphony, or attend a sporting event of a type they've never seen before—cricket, say—and they'll just get it. But that's not the case. Even as an observer, you have to practice. You have to be in the habit of attending to an artwork or an event.

ROBINETTE: The great spiritual traditions have taught us the wisdom of a life lived with attentiveness. My spiritual exercises class will introduce students to theological inquiry, which is a fancy way of describing the study of how humans ask the biggest possible questions—like what is the meaning of life? Is there a purpose to life? What is death? The objective of the class, similar to yours, is not only to explore a set of propositions about reality but also to ask, Is there a cer-

**SPIRITUAL EXERCISES:
ENGAGEMENT, EMPATHY, ETHICS**

Brian Robinette
associate professor of theology

**AESTHETIC EXERCISES:
ENGAGEMENT, EMPATHY, ETHICS**

Daniel Callahan
assistant professor of music

tain kind of training, or formation, that might enable us to ask these questions well? It is a theoretical endeavor in some ways. But it's only significant if it is inhabited or lived in, too. We'll be looking at religious views within the Christian tradition and beyond—at texts and practices from Judaism, as well as Buddhism, and at philosophical traditions that wouldn't necessarily be described as religious at all.

CALLAHAN: I expect my students to leave knowing a bit more about Plato, Aristotle, Walter Benjamin, Susan Sontag, and other interesting thinkers. But I'd also like to take them to hear the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and to museums. To be present and aware of how media affect the messages—it's important in a digital culture. I want to take students to a Boston College hockey game and have them reflect on why they feel so charged and so alive in that moment.

ROBINETTE: Can I take your course?



Daniel Callahan

Brian Robinette



Allison Adair



Sylvia Sellers-García

SELLERS-GARCÍA: Is it possible to tell the truth about the past? Most historians and most students start with a presumption that truth is what they're aiming for, but even historians have suggested that truth-telling isn't something that you can achieve. In my course, we'll question whether we can rely on historical evidence from times that are lost to us and people who have disappeared. We'll read Natalie Zemon Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre*—about a 1560 Inquisition case—asking, Can we really know what happened? I'm particularly excited to take on oral history, and the inevitable realization that actual people sitting in front of you remember things differently. I want to work with the oral account by Rigoberta Menchú, who was the Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1992 and an activist in Guatemala. A U.S. anthropologist exposed many aspects of her story as false.

ADAIR: Why is the text of an encyclopedia seemingly more authoritative, when it too has the taint (or joy) of personal perspective and perception, as oral history does? I want students to challenge assumptions about the impor-

TRUTH-TELLING IN LITERATURE

Allison Adair
associate professor of the
practice of English

TRUTH-TELLING IN HISTORY

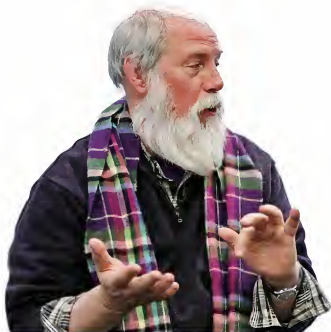
Sylvia Sellers-García
associate professor of history

tance of truth, to consider whether there's ever something that's preferable to truth—the imagination, for instance, or fiction—that could lead us to greater insight. Think of a character like Huck Finn. Huck is a kid. He's an unreliable narrator. Yet he represents a kind of moral truth. So we'll discuss the relationship between historical fact and some sort of truth that transcends dates and verifiable

information. We'll also think critically about texts that exist outside of literature—legal documents and policy papers—and discuss them as having been constructed. Students will read Christopher Columbus's exuberant early letters and his late, fourth-voyage letters when the voyage hasn't gone well, he has no money, and his reputation in Spain is at issue. The shading changes. He drops the first person. He talks about everything in passive voice.

SELLERS-GARCÍA: On a personal level, I'm excited to teach this course because we were classmates [at Brown University] and did a little joint learning there.

ADAIR: Still doing joint learning. [laughter]



Scott Cummings



Mary Kathleen Dunn

CUMMINGS: Many people might perceive a fairly large gap between a biology course and a theater course. But they're both forms of inquiry that involve experimentation. In our case, the experimentation will take place in a theater rather than in a biology laboratory. Students are going to come to the Bonn Studio Theater and collectively make short theater pieces in response to the material they're covering with you.

DUNN: Epidemics and diseases are good venues for learning science. Students in my class will study bacteria and viruses, which are part of our world and part of our bodies. We will study vaccinations and antibiotics and learn how to make intelligent decisions when epidemics occur (and they will). Human behavior is remarkably predictable, and that's going to be something worth looking at.

CUMMINGS: Epidemics and theater performances both take place in the context of a community or a society, and even though we're dealing with biology on a cellular

EPIDEMICS, DISEASE, AND HUMANITY

Mary Kathleen Dunn
associate professor of biology

DEVISING THEATER: DISEASE AS METAPHOR

Scott Cummings
associate professor of theater

level, we're also going to be thinking about matters of public policy and citizenship.

DUNN: The science class is small, which is unusual in the sciences. And through the theater class, the students will have gotten to know one another and be comfortable speaking with one another. So we'll be able to take the facts, the data, and discuss controversial situations. We'll look at the subject sometimes through current events,

sometimes through history. It will provide a lot of emotional material for a theatrical performance.

CUMMINGS: Turning these issues into theatrical scenarios is a way of personalizing and processing—of taking ownership of—abstract scientific concepts. I look forward to seeing the students that we attract, because they're going to need to have both an interest in studying cellular biology and other things that I don't understand at all, and they're also going to need to be willing to turn microorganisms into characters in a theater piece.

BARTLETT: We knew we wanted to reach a course that would involve an enduring question. On the first page of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides answers the question of what's enduring about our theme. He says that for so long as human beings are as they are, as human nature is what it is, there will be war. If that's true, and history so far hasn't refuted him, I think it's incumbent upon us to try to reflect on that sad fact, to think about our place in the world as citizens, and to try to bring a kind of moral sensibility to the inevitability of warfare.

BRINTON: One question to put to students is how Thucydides's ancient perspective is still pertinent—where it might be and where it might not be. Michael Walzer argues in *Just and Unjust Wars* that certain rules about war have arisen in the course of history, and that we should try to stick to those for the sake of justice. To me, World War II, and the Holocaust and the atomic bomb, represent a turning point, where the question of justice in war had to

**POWER, JUSTICE, WAR:
THE ANCIENTS**

Robert Bartlett
Behrakis Professor of Hellenic
Political Studies

**POWER, JUSTICE, WAR:
THE MODERNS**

Aspen Brinton
assistant professor of philosophy

be addressed urgently and differently than in the past. In my class, we'll come at power in multiple ways. In politics—in all contexts, really—you're in power relationships. There are those who are more powerful than you; you are more powerful than some others. Students will read texts representing a plurality of modern ideas, from Hobbes through Nietzsche, ending perhaps with works by Václav Havel, whose essay "The Power of the Powerless" is among his best-known.

BARTLETT: Together we'll bring in veterans who've had direct experience in warfare—in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan. In Thucydides's book, the Athenians argue that there aren't moral rules anymore, that it doesn't make sense to talk about justice in war; the opposite was argued, too. When you see the world as it is, can you really talk about moral rules, even, or especially, in warfare? We hope students will get out of this a greater facility in reading tough books. There'll be quite a bit of writing—and speaking—argument and counterargument.



Aspen Brinton



Robert Bartlett

TARA: Climate change is a great example of an issue that requires an interdisciplinary approach. As an ecologist, I look at different parts of the ecosystem—soil, plants, and other organisms, humans included—to see how they interact and function given climate change. Brian sees the world through a political and sociological lens.

BRIAN: For me, it's fascinating that people are still debating whether climate change is effected by humans. I want students to examine the role the media and other economic entities play in that debate as well as the role of politics in creating a situation where science becomes contested terrain. We'll bring in guest speakers, from both the science and the policy sides of the subject. We also want to introduce a local perspective, so we'll talk with the folks who provide Boston College with energy. This is a class where you're going to participate in discussions every time we meet—about what climate change is, and what we can do about it.

TARA: I'm going to cover the basic science. We just saw the

GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Brian Gareau
assistant professor of sociology

Tara Pisani Gareau
lecturer in earth
and environmental sciences

snowiest winter on record in Boston. How does that fit into the planet warming up? We'll look at climate change through the perspective of past cycles over thousands of years. But I also want the class to understand that climate change involves some big social justice issues. These are most prominent in areas where people live the lightest on the land. What is our responsibility as a developed country to people in developing countries? We'll study envi-

ronmental governance issues and global agreements; the United Nations climate talks in Paris next December; and the pope's upcoming encyclical, which will address climate change—we'll use that to discuss the role religious communities might have.

BRIAN: We can't teach everything in this course. But we can open the door to possible futures at Boston College, in terms of the courses our students might take, the majors they can form, even future senior theses. They'll have a good understanding of where their education can go if they choose.



Brian Gareau

Tara Pisani Gareau



Jane Ashley

Laura Tanner

TANNER: In Western philosophy, we have traditionally thought about the body as subordinate to subjectivity, or consciousness, so that it gets pushed out of the picture. But starting with philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, we've tried to readjust the balance and to think about a kind of dialogue between embodiment and spirit. The body is central to our experience of who we are. And that has implications not just for the way we frame ourselves philosophically, but for the way that we act and care for people.

ASHLEY: I'm hoping students in our courses will give thought to the question, What is empathy? What sustains it? What responsibilities do we have to ourselves? What responsibilities do we have to others, not only in our families but also in the larger society? We've both taught the article "Swamp Nurse," from the *New Yorker* [February 6, 2006], about a program to assist mothers in Louisiana with raising their children. In our courses, we're going to start off talking about health and the normal transitions that the body makes—in, say, pregnancy or aging. But we're also

THE BODY IN SICKNESS AND HEALTH

Jane Ashley
associate professor of nursing

READING THE BODY

Laura Tanner
professor of English



between mental illness and physical illness? Between someone who lives with a chronic illness for his or her life and someone who is stricken immediately and overwhelmingly? What's at stake in defining a condition as a disability? In one of my classes today, the students were talking about the idea of the flexible body: On the one hand, your body seems unchangeable, connected to your identity; on the other, if you don't like something—nip, tuck—you can change it. We'll talk about eating disorders, and obesity.

ASHLEY: I think in putting our courses together, our biggest problem is going to be . . .

TANNER: Excluding things.

going to cover trauma and pain. I'm interested in having students do some interviewing, maybe conducting a life review with someone who's older. We'll also use the Nursing School's hospital simulation lab.

TANNER: We want to get students to think about how illness is defined, not just by what happens to our bodies, but also by the unpredictability and chaos it brings to our lives. What's the difference

JOHNSON: This course is about understanding violence related particularly to race, sex, and gender. We'll be looking at domestic abuse, genocide, lynching and racial uprisings, police violence.

MCGUFFEY: Sociologists often refer to these forms of violence as structured. They have a pattern, which has historical roots but continues to be reproduced. So, violence is not only a consequence of inequality, it also creates inequality. Once violence occurs in a community, the responses to that violence often trigger the very mechanisms that caused the violence in the first place.

JOHNSON: But there have been times when matters have gotten worse and times when they've gotten better. Violence in the present seems chaotic and illogical—examining historical examples will help students to understand its modern forms. We also want to understand responses to violence. Some interventions have succeeded. How? And the survivors—are they immobilized? Are they fighting back? Are they organizing, politically or otherwise? How can we bring

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF VIOLENCE

Marilynn Johnson
professor of history

C. Shawn McGuffey
associate professor of sociology

knowledge to bear on the issues we have today? We'll also have a variety of lab projects.

MCGUFFEY: The lab component is going to involve students working in the community—with the bystander prevention program at the University's Women's Center, perhaps, or with Boston's HispanicBlackGay Coalition, which does a lot of work in the local LGBTQ community on domestic vio-

lence and sexual assault as well as hate crime prevention. Some of the best learning happens outside the classroom, and the students can bring that back to the class to share.

JOHNSON: For me, that's a really exciting way to teach. Service learning has been happening at Boston College for a long time, and my experience has been it creates an intellectual and social energy unlike any conventional classroom experience.

MCGUFFEY: We want students to develop a personal philosophy, to take what they learn in this class and apply it. How are you going to engage with the world differently now that you have this material?



Marilynn Johnson

C. Shawn McGuffey

How the Boston College core came to be

I ARRIVED AT BOSTON COLLEGE in 1998 as a new faculty member in the history department, hired to teach American urban history, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. I had no previous experience with a core, as my undergraduate institution only had one required course (outside of the major) and my graduate institution took the general-education, distribution-requirements approach.

One of the great surprises of my 18 years at Boston College has been my growing commitment to the core. I volunteered to teach in it very early on, and I've been struck by the satisfaction at being part of the larger project.

For much of Boston College's history, no one spoke of a core. Philosophy was a *de facto* major for most undergraduates through the 1950s, and all students took extensive coursework across the liberal arts. The institution began to move toward a core in the postwar era, as the student body grew and the faculty became increasingly lay. In 1963, Boston College President Michael Walsh, SJ, convened a Committee on the Total Curriculum. Walsh saw himself as a modernizer and hoped to transform Boston College into a serious research university. He launched a series of doctoral programs and began the nationalization of the student body. But at the heart of his ambitions was the undergraduate curriculum. As the Committee on the Total Curriculum began its work, Walsh wrote to his provincial in hopes of securing Rome's support for his reforms:

In an effort to provide a more scholarly and reflective setting for the college experience, it is our hope to cut the present 48-course schedule to 38 courses, with five in each of the first three years and four in the senior year (per semester). Within this less course-burdened schedule, there has also been an attempt to provide for the freedom to take advanced electives in the traditional humanistic areas such as English, languages, and history, while at the same time giving adequate but not overbalanced attention to the student's major area of study. . . .

In the ensuing back-and-forth, the provincial posed a series of questions about the curricular revisions that Walsh seemed to have in mind. Walsh's final response to the provincial was illuminating:

[It is] not by any means for the purpose of lessening the effectiveness or contribution of the liberal arts that the suggested reductions are made, but in order to provide what we sincerely feel is a schedule of studies better fitted to the talents and previous education of our current students, more consonant with the present trend in higher education to place more responsibility

BY DAVID QUIGLEY

upon the individual student for self-direction in his education, and better adapted to the realistic needs of today's undergraduates as regards preparing for graduate education.

What's striking here is Walsh's sense that moving toward a core at Boston College was a way of preparing students for the nation's best graduate schools, of supporting the free choice of undergraduates, and most notable, a way of making Boston College more like elite private universities.

Fr. Walsh and the faculty of the 1960s developed an extensive core curriculum that marked a major change from the earlier undergraduate experience. There was a sustained battle over the theology requirement in the late 1960s as the credit hours required of all students dropped first from 12 to nine and then eventually to six (where it remains).

A University Committee on Liberal Education (U.N.C.L.E.) emerged in 1969–70, hoping to clarify issues of governance and further advance a coherent core vision for the entire University. Despite its wonderful acronym, U.N.C.L.E. disappeared soon after its creation, but not before instituting one transformational legacy in the form of the PULSE program, Boston College's service learning core offering that combines courses in philosophy and theology with extensive service in Boston-area social service settings.

Twenty years later, between 1989 and 1991, Boston College faculty and students engaged in a sustained process of reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the 20-year-old core. Some irrational features of the existing core were quickly identified. For instance, there was a requirement in *either* math or the arts. Cultural diversity was identified as a major gap in the core (reflecting a national focus at the time on this aspect of higher education curricula). In 1991, a new 45-credit core was approved, and the University Core Development Committee (UCDC) was created to oversee and support core course development. While there was some initial experimentation and innovation in the early 1990s, the UCDC came to serve as the curricular gatekeeper, and the next campus-wide conversation about the core and the University's broader mission would wait until the current renewal process began in 2012. ■

David Quigley is provost and dean of faculties at Boston College. He was co-chair, with Andy Boynton, dean of the Carroll School of Management, and Mary Crane, director of the University's Institute for the Liberal Arts, of the Core Renewal Committee created in 2012. His essay is drawn and adapted from a talk given at a Boston College roundtable in fall 2013 and published in the University journal *Integritas*.



Wigfield, on the New York City set at Universal Studios, Los Angeles.

Make 'em laugh

Writer, producer, brain surgeon—when it comes to comedy on TV, Tracey Wigfield '05 has been doing it all

BY JANELLE NANOS '02

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
GARY WAYNE GILBERT

Tracey Wigfield is wearing a bright pink sweatshirt and driving an electric golf cart through Mexico. The Emmy-winning television writer, who has written for both *30 Rock* (from 2009 to 2013) and *The Mindy Project* (from 2013 to the present), is navigating the Universal Studios lot in Los Angeles, passing a series of adobe facades that have served as backdrops in films such as *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* and *iThree Amigos!*. “There’s one part of Mexico where there’s a flash flood, so you have to be careful,” she says as she maneuvers the cart uphill before making a sharp turn left onto Wisteria Lane (“Colonial

Street” on the lot map), where the *Desperate Housewives* series was shot.

“I never got to work on a lot when I was on *30 Rock* because we filmed in a big warehouse,” she says, gathering her long brown hair along the nape of her neck with one hand as she steers with the other. “I’m shocked I haven’t gotten in a golf cart crash.”

She cruises back toward her office, past the set of a zombie apocalypse, taking a detour into a New York City streetscape to show off Mindy Lahiri’s apartment.

As a writer and supervising producer of *The Mindy Project*, the Fox sitcom of three seasons, Wigfield is part of the team responsible for concocting the dialogue and storylines for Dr. Mindy Lahiri, the smart, sassy gynecologist and the show’s namesake, played by actress Mindy Kaling. This past season, she’s not only been writing scripts but has been performing them as well, playing the role of Dr. Lauren Neustadter, a brain surgeon who’s been the love interest of a couple of the show’s characters.

Writing and acting in combination takes ambition and dexterity, two qualities Wigfield has demonstrated throughout her life, whether as a child juggling professional acting and homework in grade school, or as a double major in theater and English at Boston College. Since graduating in 2005, she has worked on two television comedies created by their female stars. She watched Tina Fey write and produce *30 Rock* and play the lead as Liz Lemon—and, in 2013, she shared an Emmy with Fey for cowriting the series’ finale. Kaling, her present boss, started as a writer, too, on *The Office*, before joining that show’s cast as the irrepressible gossip Kelly Kapoor; then Kaling created her own show.

Colleagues say they see a similar trajectory playing out in Wigfield’s future, and that it’s only a matter of time before she creates, and perhaps stars, in her own sitcom. “She’s a great actress,” says Kaling, “she’s just such a star.” And she adds, “Her ability to be funny and potentially to make a fool of herself has been very useful to our show.”

Wigfield steers through the New York City streetscape, pulling up alongside the brick front that stands in for Lahiri’s apartment building.

“I would have been so excited if I’d told myself as a kid that I would get to work here,” she says. “It’s like working in an amusement park.”

Wigfield, whose official title on the show is co-executive producer, is in some ways a product of television. As she was growing up in Wayne, New Jersey, her family bonded over the popular comedies of the day—*Seinfeld*, *Friends*, *Frasier*, *Cheers*—and watched *The Late Show* with David Letterman together each night. Wigfield began writing and filming sketches in the style of *Saturday Night Live* when she was in grade school, tackling Jane Austen parodies and

other, more adult subjects; she created a talk show in which the host was transitioning from male to female.

"I was 11! I had TV in my room way too young," she said over dinner one night last fall in Beverly Hills. She'd picked a restaurant described by the *Los Angeles Times* as "neo-Vietnamese-turned-neo-Nordic," because she was in the midst of eating her way through a list of top restaurants. "I feel like when this list is done I'm going to have to make a major life change," she said.

Wigfield's father, Dave, is an attorney with a sharp wit, and her mother, Kathy, has always been a fan of show business (the name Tracey comes from Tracey Quartermaine, a longtime character on *General Hospital*). Wigfield's mother encouraged her daughters (Wigfield's sister, Ashley, is younger by three years) to gain confidence through dance

"It's the things that get in your craw a bit and that you're passionate about that make the best subjects," she said. She echoed that sentiment as she picked at a plate of biodynamic leeks. "That's kind of the beauty of comedy," she said. "It's a perspective that's adjacent to the normal."

performances and gymnastics routines, which is how the family first encountered a talent scout.

Wigfield claims her sister—whose blonde hair, blue eyes, and cherubic looks were commanding even at a young age—attracted the scout's attention. "A manager came to our dance school and saw my beautiful little sister and said, 'We'll represent you,'" Wigfield said. "And my mom was like, 'And her too.' I had the same length arms and legs as I do now, I was a gawky child."

Auditions for commercials and theater productions in New York City followed, and Tracey and Ashley were eventually represented by Shirley Grant, a talent manager who helped launch the careers of the singing Jonas Brothers, Christina Ricci (who played Wednesday Addams in the film *The Addams Family*), and Keshia Knight Pulliam (Rudy Huxtable in *The Cosby Show*).

The Wigfield girls found modest success. Tracey acted in several commercials, including one for the Glitterator, a toy that affixed sparkles to plastic jewelry (the ad can still be viewed on YouTube). Acting offered the girls "something that they felt they were meant to do," says their mother. "And it brought the three of us together, it bonded us so close that we were like the Three Musketeers."

Today, Wigfield's Emmy sits on the family mantle in New Jersey. Her mother, says Wigfield, was the inspiration for Rhea Perlman's character in this season of *The Mindy Project*

(Annette Castellano, the mother of Mindy's boyfriend). And since Wigfield and her sister Ashley, who is still acting, now live together in Los Angeles, their mother frequently visits.

"My mom has a crazy amount of confidence, and so do I," says Wigfield. "It's the sense that 'You're going to love to meet me.' That's the greatest gift she's given me."

Still, by the time Wigfield was ready to begin college, she began to feel that she had outgrown her desire to audition. "I remember thinking, I don't want to do that again," she says. "I don't know if it was the rejection of it, but I really wanted to do something that felt creatively satisfying. . . . And I liked to write." So Wigfield decided against pursuing an acting degree at New York University, and instead undertook her dual majors at Boston College.

"Tracey always had an unusual, I would say a unique sensibility," associate professor of theater Scott Cummings recalls. "It was a particularly oblique sense of humor. . . . She would make observations that were amusing and also kind of insightful, sometimes with a little bit of a barbed edge, and oftentimes very self-deprecating."

"When I find someone like that as a student," he continues, "somebody who has their own point of view, own perspective, own voice, I get them to keep talking, or keep writing. And for Tracey it was a little bit of both."

Wigfield performed often on Boston College's Robsham Theater and Bonn Studio stages (though never, as it happened, opposite classmate Bryce Pinkham '05, who would go on to be nominated in 2014 for a Tony Award for best actor in a musical on the basis of his role in *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*). "With the utmost purpose and humor," wrote a *Heights* reviewer, she played the hardened, cheated-on wife Charlotte in *A Little Night Music*; in a showcase of one-acts that included two Molière comedies, she took the serious route, playing a troubled young woman in a modern drama.

And she worked at her writing. In the spring of 2014, Wigfield told a packed auditorium of Boston College students that the comedy-writing class she took with English lecturer Steve Almond taught her a valuable secret of the craft: "Writing funny" doesn't have to stem from pure amusement. Anger can help.

"It's the things that get in your craw a bit and that you're passionate about that make the best subjects," she said. She echoed that sentiment in the restaurant, as she picked at a plate of what the menu called biodynamic leeks.

"That's kind of the beauty of comedy," she said. "It's a perspective that's adjacent to the normal."

Wigfield is not a standup type comedian, looking to work a room, constantly covering the crowd's attention. Her humor is wry, full of candor, very self-aware, and always teetering on the slightly bizarre.



In *The Mindy Project* writers' room (clockwise from left): Alina Mankin, Jeremy Bronson, Chris Schleicher, Wigfield, Jeremy Tramer, and Miranda Berman.

"Have you ever done an interview where someone puts their makeup on?" she asked a reporter the following day, as she sat at her desk in *The Mindy Project* offices, applying mascara to her lashes.

This scene, as it turns out, was not unique. Wigfield routinely brings her entire makeup regimen to the office, says Matt Warburton, the showrunner. "She's famous for doing a certain amount of her personal grooming in the writers' room. It's freed us all up to bring our home rituals in," he said. "It's like a giant bedroom in there."

The writers' room is perhaps the second most famous aspect of the television production experience, particularly in the case of comedy writers, where it's essentially a joke foundry. Each funny idea is infinitely malleable, and writers can spend 12-to-14-hour days sculpting and shaping a comedic narrative until it gleams. Inside the room at *The Mindy Project*, which is closed to visitors when work is in progress, Wigfield has a reputation for telling stories, and for "always trying to improve the product," says her colleague Jeremy Bronson, a supervising producer on the show. "Tracey is also a big laugh," he adds "and that makes writers' rooms not only more fun, but I think they yield bet-

ter material when people give it up and laugh. And she is definitely one of those people."

There is something in Wigfield's high level of comfort in the writers' room that points to her experience as a student at the all-girls Immaculate Heart Academy in Washington, New Jersey, an experience she has said "prepared me to be the only girl in the room."

In a commencement address she gave in June 2014, Wigfield described for an Immaculate Heart audience the extent to which women are underrepresented in her field. "Only 30 percent of television writers are women—and when you talk about comedy television, that number drops to 10 percent," she said. She has, on occasion, "spent time in writers' rooms filled with men"—although not at *The Mindy Project*, where the female to male ratio is four to six, nor in the final days of *30 Rock* when the ratio there was five to seven.

Partly, she said, the problem is that "not that many women are attempting to become writers... maybe because comedy writing is scary. You have to be bold, and loud, and not care when you confidently say a joke and no one laughs." "Being in a community of all women [at Immaculate Heart]," she

said, "I always felt free to speak my mind and make mistakes. I never felt like because I am a girl, I shouldn't be allowed to be gross or weird or loud."

After graduating from Boston College, Wigfield moved back in with her parents and launched an offensive on New York City television, applying for any starting job that she thought might give her an entrée into the industry. Eventually, she secured a covered gig as a page on the David Letterman show. ("My job was to say 'The ladies room is there,'" she says, gesticulating toward an invisible door. "A sign could say that." She adds, "Or they could just find it.")

It was through the show that she first encountered Rob Burnett, an executive producer, past head writer, and former intern at *Letterman* (the ladies room was near the control room, it turned out). Burnett took a liking to her, and offered her a job as production assistant (a.k.a. "gofer") on a comedy series he was developing called *The Knights of Prosperity* (2007). Soon she had the job of the writers' production assistant (writers' gofer). "Rob was my first mentor," Wigfield told *Cosmopolitan* in October 2014, "and I think he saw something in me. He would give me opportunities to write content for the show's website and pitch little jokes here and there."

The short-lived *Knights* was filmed in Silvercup Studios, the Long Island City production site where both *The Sopranos* and *30 Rock* were filmed. After the show was cancelled, Burnett passed along Wigfield's resume to friends at *30 Rock*. Wigfield was asked to temporarily fill in as the writers' assistant—the person who takes notes in the writers' room, keeping track of potential storylines and jokes—until the person hired for the job arrived from California. She started working during the second season and stayed through the series' end—the seventh.

"*30 Rock* was so labor intensive and so hard, I was just there taking notes and I think they just forgot to tell me to stop coming in," she jokes now. "Or they forgot to call and tell this guy he didn't have the job."

In truth, the writers had begun to notice her promise. "She's one of the most talented and special writers

I've ever been around," says Jack Burditt, a television writer and producer with five Emmys who met Wigfield when she began working alongside him on *30 Rock*. "Her brain is weird in a fantastic way."

Wigfield says that despite being paralyzed at the prospect of bombing in front of Tina Fey, she eventually found the confidence to begin piping up with her own joke ideas in the meetings. Before long, she was helping to shape the backstories of the series' sincerely bizarre characters and authoring an NBC web series called *Kenneth the Web Page*. It starred Jack McBrayer, who played the page on *30 Rock*, and the series' short videos provided an opportunity for his hokey farm-boy character to host a late night talk show, offer tips on how to exercise ("and still give your job 100 percent," and retell the history of Thanksgiving. In less than two years, Wigfield was asked to submit a spec script and was invited to become a *30 Rock* staff writer contributing two full episodes a year (out of a standard 22) in addition to the collaborative work of the writers' room.

"I've written scripts before with staff writers, a lot of time you have to do the heavy lifting," says Burditt, "but everything she'd send in was fully formed. She became one of my favorite writers of all time."

One of her standouts, during season five, was "Queen of Jordan," a spoof on reality series that mocked the *Real Housewives* franchise. It caught the attention of Mindy Kaling, who tweeted about it while she was still filming *The*



Wigfield, on set with Dave Stassen, a *Mindy Project* producer.

Office. As *30 Rock* drew to a close, Wigfield was one of four writers selected to map out the final episode. She and Fey wrote the two-part finale together, and took home the Emmy for it on September 22, 2013.

As *30 Rock* was finishing up (the last episode aired January 31, 2013), Kaling invited Jack Burditt to join the staff of *The Mindy Project*, which had premiered in September 2012 and was still getting off the ground. He said he'd bring Wigfield as well. "We wrapped *30 Rock* December 20th and on January 1st we moved to L.A.," he says. "She lived with me and my family for three weeks while she looked for an apartment."

Mindy showrunner Warburton sums up Wigfield's contribution since, saying, "Tracey brings a certain kind of sharp confidence to the character of Mindy in particular that I think is definitely influenced by her own personality."

Wigfield finished her makeup just as she got a signal from an assistant: Mindy was free to chat.

Mindy Kaling's office is lined with *Bridget Jones* posters and a rack of Spanx. The actress was eating a Pop Tart, and had wrapped herself in a Tartan blanket despite the balmy fall weather. Wigfield, obviously at ease, sat across from her on the couch, her legs curled up beneath her. They bantered about their first Twitter exchange, shortly after the "Queen of Jordan" episode aired in 2011, and how Kaling had been mystified by Wigfield's lack of an Internet presence—the only photo of Wigfield online at that time was a headshot she had posed for six years earlier, at 22.

"I knew that she worked at *30 Rock* and was very funny and that she ate at McDonald's fairly regularly," Kaling said (Wigfield follows the chain on Twitter). In two years of working together, Kaling said, she became aware of Wigfield's acting history and pushed her into the role of Lauren this season. "My favorite people to work with on [*The Office*] were the writer-performers," she said, a reference to executive producers Paul Lieberstein, who played Toby, and B.J. Novak, who played Ryan. "My favorite thing is to take unwilling writers and make them performers."

At that, Wigfield hops up and makes a quick exit, seemingly a tad uncomfortable being at the center of the limelight. But Kaling continues. "Tracey is so talented that she can do whatever she wants," she says. "Obviously, creating her own show will definitely happen if she wants that. But also I can see her writing amazing movies too. I think she enjoys acting, and she's such a funny actress that if she wanted to be the star of her own show, I really think she can do anything."



On a Universal sound stage with Mindy Kaling.

In the downtime between episodes, Wigfield has been rewriting an animated screenplay for Sony, crafting jokes for Golden Globes hosts Tina Fey and Amy Poehler '93, and developing potential show ideas of her own. (She says that when she does decide to write a sitcom pilot, it will almost certainly center on a relationship that resembles the one that she shares with her mother.) And in January of this year she spent several days guest hosting on *The View*, the coffee-clatch daytime talk show that typically features an all-female panel. A good listener on her first day as others clamored for the camera ("They don't really prepare you," she noted later, "and I was worried I'd offend a protected class"), she chose for her initial foray into the conversation an account of shopping with her mother the previous weekend, then offered wry observations on a Twitter spat between actor Charlie Sheen and reality TV personality Kim Kardashian.

"Tracey once wrote a line for my character that went 'I'm going to hell,'" Kaling recalls. "The other character says 'Why are you going to hell?' and my character goes, 'Because I love gossip and I don't care about the environment' . . . When my character says something that's really dark and a truthful observation but it's also hilarious, especially when it's a single woman in her thirties," she said, "Tracey has written it." ■

At press time, Fox announced it was not renewing The Mindy Project. Talks were reported underway between Universal Television and Hulu to continue the show on the Internet. —Ed.

Janelle Nanos '02 is the editor of BetaBoston, a *Boston Globe* website reporting on "technology, innovation, and startups." She is also a visiting lecturer at Boston College, teaching "Magazine Journalism."

Picture it

THE RETIREMENT CRISIS ILLUSTRATED

“JUST 30 YEARS AGO, MOST AMERICAN WORKERS were able to stop working in their early sixties and enjoy a long and comfortable retirement.” So begin the three coauthors—two from Boston College’s Center for Retirement Research (CRR), the third a noted investment advisor—of a lay-friendly book on Social Security and retirement, published in December. If their introduction seems somehow ominous, the reader is not in suspense for long, as they continue: “This brief golden age is now over.”

The authors are Alicia Munnell, the Peter F. Drucker Professor of Management Sciences at the Carroll School of Management and CRR’s director; Andrew Eschtruth, CRR’s associate director for external relations; and Charles Ellis, who for 30 years was managing partner of Greenwich Associates, a research-based consultancy. They consider their book an alarm—“a little like Paul Revere’s famous ride,” they write. The *Wall Street Journal* called it “clear, concise, and convincing.” *Money* magazine called it the “best new book on retirement.”

In 128 pages of text and charts, *Falling Short: The Coming Retirement Crisis and What to Do About It* addresses the fact that most Americans lack the savings they need (“six to 11 times their earnings, depending on when they retire”) to live as comfortably in retirement as they do now. The authors describe working Americans’ three options—“our only options,” they say: “Accept that we are going to be poor in retirement”; “save more”; “work longer.”

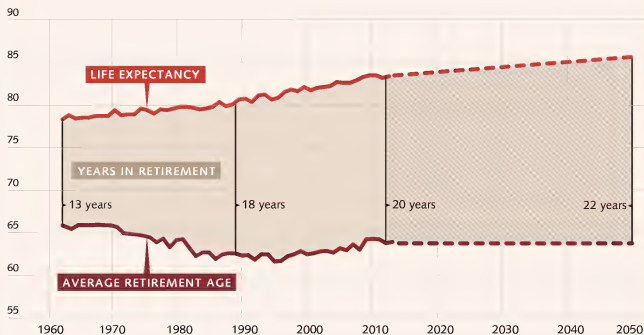
Under “save more” they include recommendations targeted and substantial: to older individuals, consider your home equity (sign on for a reversible-rate mortgage in retirement, if you need to); to the nation, “Fix Social Security.” Payouts from Social Security already represent a declining percentage of pre-retirement earnings, they say, “and additional cuts could cause steep drops in living standards and higher poverty.” With that prospect, say the authors, we should focus first on injecting funds into the Social Security system, not reducing benefits.

The multidisciplinary Center for Retirement Research at Boston College was created in 1998 with a grant from the Social Security Administration, to form part of the external Retirement Research Consortium that now includes centers at the University of Michigan and the National Bureau of Economic Research. The CRR’s mandate is three-pronged: to conduct research and evaluations (sometimes on “a quick turnaround” at the Administration’s request); to share findings, not just with specialists, but also with the public and policymakers; and to train the next generation of research scholars.

THE CHARTS AND TEXT THAT FOLLOW ARE DRAWN and adapted from *Falling Short: The Coming Retirement Crisis and What to Do About It* (copyright © Oxford University Press, 2014). The book may be purchased at a discount from the Boston College Bookstore, via bc.edu/bcm.

Retirements have gotten longer

Average years in retirement for men, 1962–2050

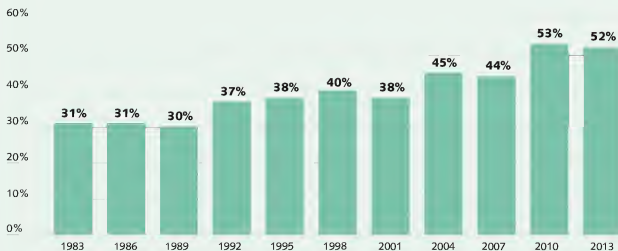


A sharp increase in Social Security benefits in 1972 contributed to a decline in the average retirement age. The downward trend stopped in the mid-1980s due to several factors, such as Social Security incentives to retire later and a better-educated workforce with more attractive employment opportunities.

SOURCES: Authors' estimates from U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey* (1962–2012); and U.S. Social Security Administration (2013)

FALLING SHORT IN RETIREMENT IS INCREASINGLY LIKELY

The National Retirement Risk Index, 1983–2013

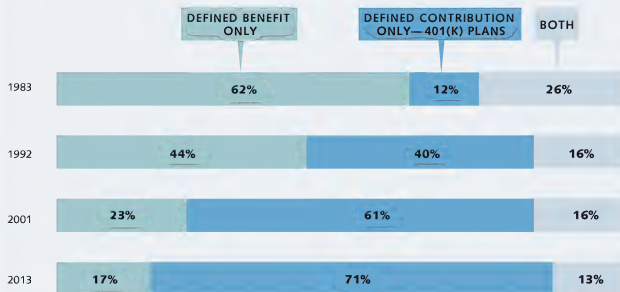


Roughly 35 million American households—52 percent—will not have enough retirement income to maintain their standard of living if they retire at 65 (which is past the current average retirement age), even if they annuitize all their financial assets and obtain a reverse mortgage.

SOURCE: Munnell, Rutledge, and Webb (2014)

Employer plans have shifted to 401(k)s

Workers with pension coverage by type of plan, 1983, 1992, 2001, and 2013

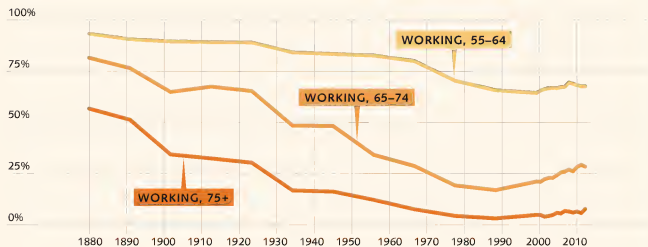


When 401(k) plans began to spread rapidly in the 1980s, they were viewed mainly as supplements to employer-funded defined benefit pensions and profit-sharing plans. As a consequence, workers still bear all the market risks, with almost complete discretion over investment, savings, and drawdowns.

SOURCES: Authors' calculations based on U.S. Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, *Survey of Consumer Finances* (1983, 1992, 2001, and 2013)

MEN RETIRED EARLIER AND EARLIER FROM THE 1880s TO THE 1980s

Workforce participation rates of men, by age group, 1880–2012



With 19th-century industrialization, production increasingly moved from households to larger enterprises. This reduced the opportunity for older people to keep working; they were no longer their own bosses, and employers were not interested in employees with deteriorating physical capacities.

SOURCE: University of Minnesota, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (1880–2012)

Interest rates have fallen to historic lows

Real interest rate, 1960–2013

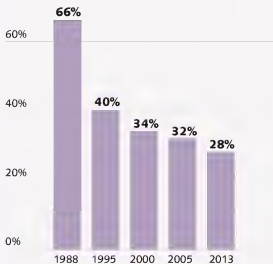


Lower interest rates mean households will need to save more to generate a given amount of retirement income.

SOURCES: U.S. Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System (2013); Haubrich, Pennacchi, and Ritchken (2011); and unpublished estimates from Richard Kopcke

Firms have cut back on retiree health coverage

Percentage of employers (with 200+ workers) offering retiree health benefits, 1988–2013

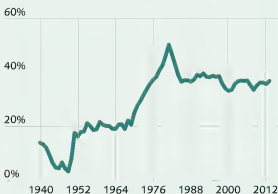


Between 1988 and 2013, the share of large firms offering post-retirement healthcare dropped dramatically. The generosity of benefits also declined, as employers required retirees to pay larger premium contributions and more copayments, with higher out-of-pocket limits and deductibles.

SOURCE: Health Research & Educational Trust (2013)

Social Security grew more generous after World War II

Social Security replacement rate for a medium earner retiring at age 65, 1940–2013

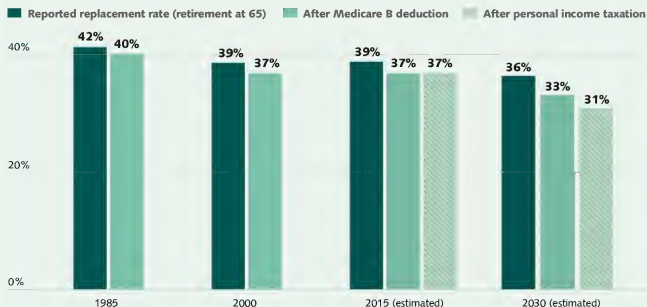


Postwar surges in wages and inflation left benefits below 20 percent of preretirement income. Legislation in 1950 raised the rate to about 28 percent, with seven adjustments holding it there for about 20 years. In 1972, increases became tied to the Consumer Price Index.

SOURCE: U.S. Social Security Administration (2013)

Social Security is shrinking

Social Security replacement rates for an average earner retiring at age 65, in 1985, 2000, 2015, and 2030

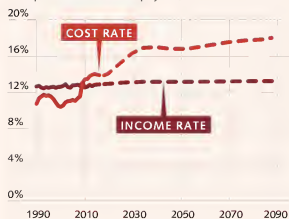


Replacement rates will decline for three reasons: the phasing in of already-legislated benefit cuts (through lifting the full retirement age from 65 to 67); rising Medicare premiums; and taxation (the percentage of households subject to tax on their benefits will climb from 37 to beyond 50 percent by 2030).

SOURCES: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (2013) and U.S. Social Security Administration (2013)

Social Security faces a shortfall

Projected Social Security income and cost rates, as a percent of taxable payroll, 1990–2088

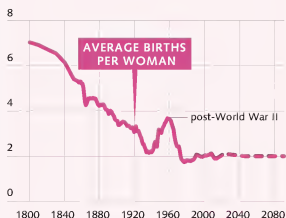


The Baby Boom is not "a pig in a python"—a large cohort just passing through and once the last member dies, life returns to normal. Costs will stay high due to long-term increases in life expectancy and the stabilization of the low birth rate.

SOURCE: U.S. Social Security Administration (2014)

Falling birth rates are a major driver of an aging society

Fertility rates in the United States, 1800–2080

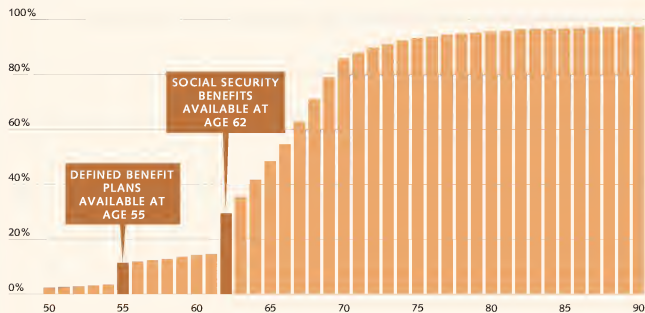


Soon after Social Security's expansion in the 1970s, it became clear that the decline in the birth rate was most likely permanent. Social Security can pay full benefits through 2033. Thereafter, payroll taxes cover only about 75 percent of commitments.

SOURCES: Coale and Zelnick (1963); Bell (1997); and U.S. Social Security Administration (2013)

Working until 70 does the trick for most retirees

Cumulative readiness by retirement age

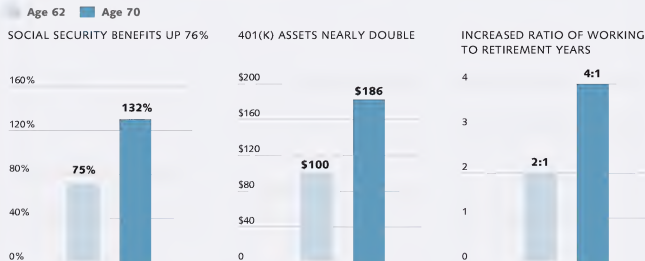


Given the special value of Social Security income—adjusted for inflation and continuing for life—it makes sense to postpone claiming it to get the highest monthly amount, at age 70. More than 85 percent of working-age households would be financially prepared for retirement if they worked to age 70.

SOURCE: Munnell, Webb, Delorme, and Golub-Sass (2012)

WORKING LONGER HELPS RETIREMENT SECURITY IN THREE WAYS

Impact of working longer on Social Security, 401(k)s, and the retirement span



In addition to producing current income, extending our work life to age 70 yields a large increase in monthly Social Security benefits. It allows us to contribute more to our 401(k), generating more income from investment. And it shortens the time our savings must last. Assume an individual starts working at 22 and retires either at 62 or 70: He or she either works 40 years and retires for 20 (2:1) or works 48 years and retires for 12 (4:1).

SOURCE: Authors' calculations using Vanguard (2014) 401(k) holdings by age for the middle panel

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D-i-v-o-r-c-e

By William Bole

The rules of separation—Catholic, Jewish, Protestant

OVER THE PAST 40 YEARS IN THE United States, divorce has become almost as commonplace as marriage, and religious communities have tried to adjust to this social reality that touches millions of congregants. But how much has really changed in the way organized religion handles divorce among believers? This was the general question posed at a two-day conference in late March titled “Protestant, Catholic, Jew . . . Divorcing,” sponsored by Boston College’s Center for Christian-Jewish Learning.

On Sunday, March 22, the conference looked closely at each of these three traditions, one by one, through the lens of divorce as well as remarriage. The discussion, held in the Heights Room, began with Judaism, going “in order of the age of the tradition,” quipped Mark Oppenheimer in opening remarks. The author of the “Beliefs” column for the *New York Times*, Oppenheimer organized the conference as holder of the 2014–15 Corcoran Visiting Chair in Christian-Jewish Relations at Boston College.

The first session, moderated by Oppenheimer, featured four special-

ists—variously, academics, rabbis, and activists—on Judaism and divorce. Apart from some historical background, the panel focused entirely on present-day Orthodox Judaism. That branch has recently spawned highly publicized clashes between estranged spouses or former spouses, over the granting of religious divorces (as distinct from civil divorces, which many also obtain).

Sketching the history, Lois Dubin of Smith College began with the definitive biblical text, Deuteronomy 24:1, which allows a husband to divorce his wife by handing her a written decree to that effect and sending her “out of his house.” Dubin pointed out that in keeping with this religious law, “Only a man can initiate a divorce, not a woman.” But she added that in various times and places over the past millennium, rabbinic authorities have “mitigated the unilateral nature” of Jewish religious divorce—for example, by pressuring men to grant their wives a divorce after the couple has separated. (And some Jews have bypassed religious authorities altogether, seeking civil divorces as far back as the late 18th century, in Europe.)



A bishop nullifies a marriage—from a 12th-century rendering of Byzantine emperor Justinian's 6th-century legal digest, the *Pandectae*.

Today, non-Orthodox branches of Judaism have, to varying degrees, loosened their strictures against women initiating a religious divorce, or have abolished them altogether, in the case of Reform Judaism. But the large and growing Orthodox communities continue to hew closely to Deuteronomy, according to the panelists.

To be released from a religious marriage, an Orthodox Jewish woman must receive from her husband the divorce document known in Hebrew as a *get*, said Susan Aranoff, an economics professor at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn. Aranoff is also codirector of Agunah International, an organization advocating on behalf of Orthodox women whose husbands withhold the *get*. Agunah is Hebrew for “chained woman,” and Aranoff said that without the *get*, a woman “cannot go on with her life.” She cannot remarry in the Orthodox community, and if she marries otherwise, her future children are branded as illegitimate, explained Aranoff, who estimated broadly that there are thousands of *agunot* (the plural) in the United States. Sometimes the man is able to remarry in a religious ceremony, using a

loophole in rabbinic law, but his first wife remains chained for years, she added.

Rabbi Yona Reiss, chief judge of the Chicago Rabbinical Court, told of how he and some other Orthodox rabbis are considering use of prenuptial agreements to level the field. Under such a stipulation, the man would agree to let a rabbinic court decide whether the *get* should be granted at the woman's request, in the event that the marriage, for all practical purposes, ends. Following Reiss on the panel, Rabbi Jeremy Stern, executive director of the Organization for the Resolution of Agunot, described a confrontational tactic he has employed: holding rallies outside homes and workplaces to shame Orthodox men into giving the *get*. Stern called *get* refusal “a form of domestic abuse,” and often a way of gaining leverage in divorce settlements. For her part, Aranoff said in an interview that she is simply urging Orthodox women to forgo Orthodox weddings, which, she acknowledged, could alienate them from that faith community.

The second panel, moderated by Mark Massa, SJ, dean of the School of Theology

and Ministry at Boston College, was dedicated to divorce, Roman Catholic-style.

Lisa Sowle Cahill, the University's J. Donald Monan, SJ, Professor of Theology, pointed to Matthew 19, which renders Jesus as saying, “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” The verse appears to ban divorce, except in cases of “unchastity.” Then Cahill cited Corinthians, in which St. Paul adds another exception to the rule, declaring that if an unbelieving spouse of a Christian wants to end a marriage, “let it be so,” because “it is to peace that God has called you.” Noting the shift within the New Testament, she commented: “Just as [Church teaching] developed to this point, it could develop in the future.”

Fr. Mark O'Connell, judicial vicar of the Archdiocese of Boston and head of the archdiocese's marriage tribunal, summarized the status quo. “Marriage is an act of God. That's why we say it's indissoluble,” said O'Connell, alluding to the sacrament of matrimony. Furthermore, a divorced Catholic who civilly remarries is viewed by the Church as still married to the first spouse, and is officially barred

from receiving Holy Communion. That is, unless he or she had received an annulment. The priest said a marriage can be annulled when the tribunal finds that the man and woman did not fully exchange their consent prior to taking vows. He did not offer an example of what he termed “defects in the consent,” but petitioners for annulment often allege that a partner never intended to be faithful, or that an impairment such as substance abuse or mental illness made consent to lifelong marriage impossible.

Melissa Wilde, associate professor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, related that until the 1970s annulments were rarely granted, but that the numbers swelled as divorce became widespread. More recently, annulment rates have fallen considerably, partly because fewer Catholics have been choosing Church weddings in the first place, and because Catholics also have fewer compunctions about remarrying without an annulment, said Wilde. Many go on receiving Communion, despite the formal ban, with no pushback from pastors and fellow parishioners.

In an exchange among the panelists, Cahill said almost anyone who has been married for more than 40 years, as she and her husband have, would be able to identify imperfections in the marriage going back to the beginning. Her comment was apparently directed at Fr. O’Connell’s remarks on “defects in the consent.” The priest turned to her and said, “You’d have a hard time with my tribunal,” explaining that if it took 40 years for a spouse to discover a supposed defect, it probably isn’t a terrible one.

During a Q&A, Rabbi Reiss stood up and asked with a smile if King Henry VIII would find the Catholic Church more amenable to his annulment request, were he petitioning today. O’Connell let the question pass. Wilde said Henry would need to prove that his wife, Catherine of Aragon, never intended to bear children (or a male heir, in this instance). In the end, she said, “He still would have had to create his own church,” that of England.

Unlike Catholics and Orthodox Jews, Protestants have no system of religious divorce or annulment. They rely entirely on civil divorce, and have made their peace

with it, according to a selection of their scholars. The three panelists focused on evangelical Protestantism, whose ministers at one time would have been loath to perform a marriage ceremony for a divorcee. “All that changed dramatically around 1980,” noted Randall Balmer, an Episcopal priest and chair of Dartmouth College’s religion department. The impetus was politics: Newly galvanized, conservative evangelicals threw their weight behind a divorced-and-remarried presidential aspirant, Ronald Reagan. “That changed utterly the landscape of opposition by evangelicals to divorce in the late 20th century,” according to Balmer.

Since then, divorce rates have shot up among evangelical Christians, said the panelists. David Gushee, professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University, an evangelical institution in Georgia, related that it is “fairly typical” for parents of his students to have been married and divorced three or four times. Gushee believes the pendulum has swung too far toward permissiveness in the evangelical

fold. “Not every divorce is morally neutral,” he said, citing the proverbial case of a married man running off with his younger secretary. “It can be a profound act of injustice, morally disorienting for children.”

Heather White, research scholar and adjunct professor of religion at New College of Florida, described how politics has continued to reshape evangelical thinking about key biblical passages on divorce.

She drilled down into Matthew 19, in which Jesus also says “male and female . . . become one flesh” when joined by God in marriage. Understood for two millennia as addressing divorce, the passage is now widely cast as prohibiting gay marriage: White related that evangelical interpreters today often zoom in on the man and woman, to reveal the “heterosexual nature of one flesh.” She said the Southern Baptist Convention has passed 10 resolutions in recent years citing Matthew 19—“almost all in reference to same-sex marriage.” ■

Real time

By William Bole

A student retreat in the midst of everything

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SPRING semester, Jessica Lyons ’17—who is both pre-med and majoring in theology—embarked on a spiritual retreat of more than two weeks’ duration. She never set foot off campus for that purpose and did not miss a class or extracurricular activity. Instead, she and about 75 other students strove to achieve contemplation in the midst of their demanding routines.

Boston College’s Office of Campus Ministry ran the program, called “Journey in Lent” (formerly, the “Busy Student Retreat”). It has three essential components: solitary prayer; group reflection; and one-on-one meetings with a “spiritual companion,” usually a professor or staff

member, who helps the students with their prayer lives.

The Lenten journeyers pledged to set aside 20 minutes a day for individual prayer during the retreat’s 16 consecutive days in March. By nearly all accounts, this was the hard part.

“It’s a goal,” said Lyons, who also volunteers in the emergency department at Newton-Wellesley Hospital and in a biology research lab at Boston University. She met the target last year as a freshman, she said. “If organic chemistry didn’t exist, I’d have my 20 minutes [this year].” Lyons also suggested that her style of prayer does not lend itself to bloc scheduling. She tends to pray and reflect spontane-

ously, responding to what she termed “the little sufferings and struggles”—a difficult moment with a friend, say, or a disappointing test score. “I’ve learned to be more patient with my prayer life,” Lyons said with an easy smile. “I think it’s okay. God wants you to be with him in the mundane.”

The retreat began officially on the evening of March 10, less than four weeks before Easter. Three dozen students (roughly two thirds of them women) turned out for a group meeting in the University’s Multi-Faith Center. A small, denominationally nondescript chapel with an arched ceiling, the center is located in the rear of the residence hall named for its address, 66 Commonwealth Avenue. Campus Ministry held four of these general gatherings there during the retreat and asked participants to attend a couple of them.

At that first meeting, Rick Rossi, who coordinates the program with his colleague Mary Sweeney, SC, joined the students seated in a circle on folding chairs. He opened with a Thomas Merton quote: “In the spiritual life, there are no tricks and no shortcuts.” A Trappist monk, Merton had gone on to say (in his 1969 book *Contemplative Prayer*) that the spiritual seeker must always have the attitude of a “beginner,” hungry to learn and relearn. Rossi quoted Merton again: “Those who think they ‘know’ from the beginning will never in fact come to know anything.”

With a straight face, Rossi assigned the students to go to Campus Ministry’s website and download an app for tracking their prayer minutes. Two seconds of silence gave way to laughs as they absorbed the spirit of his request. Turning serious, Rossi said that traditional (and contemporary) spiritual practices—formal prayer, abstinence during Lent—are merely means toward the end of drawing closer to God. “Whatever serves the end—great. Whatever doesn’t, don’t worry about it. Let it go,” he advised. “It’s about relationship, not rules.”

Then Rossi engaged the students in a reflection exercise. He asked them, first, to “notice your physical self . . . your feet on the floor . . . body in the chair.” He asked them to also imagine their random thoughts leaving the room, and to

meditate on specific moments in recent days, before inviting them to contemplate “sitting and having a conversation with God or Jesus” about their concerns. The hourlong session ended with communal prayers—“for all those who feel isolated in their spiritual and social lives,” offered one young woman.

Before departing, each student went to a table and picked up a small, scissor-cut sheet of printer paper with his or her name on the side facing up. On the back was the name of a designated spiritual companion.

Forty professors, staff members, and administrators—from quarters ranging from Campus Ministry and the School of

On the door is a handmade sign—“No Interruptions.”

Like other companions interviewed for this article, McCoy underscored the confidentiality of these conversations. “Actually, the most important part is listening. I’m accompanying them,” she noted. Generally, she encourages a student to reflect more deeply on “how God is working in her life,” in a particular situation or struggle. Often, McCoy will suggest a resonant biblical psalm or Gospel selection and say, “Pray over this passage” during the week.

Some companions work with two or three students (separately), but still there aren’t enough of them. Jemima Victor ’15,

The Lenten journeyers pledged to set aside 20 minutes a day for individual prayer during the retreat’s 16 consecutive days in March. By nearly all accounts, this was the hard part.

Theology and Ministry to the Law School and Human Resources—served as companions. Although most companions are not trained spiritual directors, according to Rossi, Campus Ministry recruits faculty and others who are known on campus for mentoring students on non-academic matters. Before each retreat, the companions come together for a discussion of the program and its spiritual approach, and they converge again afterward for a debriefing.

One of the companions this spring was Marina McCoy, associate professor of philosophy and the department’s director of undergraduate studies. McCoy said she has received spiritual direction from a Jesuit and a religious sister at Boston College for eight or nine years, and the student Lenten program allows her to “pass on a gift that’s been given to me.”

McCoy met with her Lenten journey student three times in her third-floor office in Stokes Hall. On such an occasion, she turns off the overhead light, leaving only the soft light of a desk lamp and the daylight entering through a large window. She places two identical chairs in front of her desk so that she and the student can sit facing each other, at a close distance.

an applied psychology and human development major in the Lynch School of Education, said she registered too late to have an assigned companion—“so I’m journaling instead,” using writing as a substitute for those interactions and attending the group meetings. During an interview in the first-floor common space of Stokes, she pulled out her phone, which contains an app for the Holy Bible. Victor, who attends a Haitian Baptist church in Boston, says her journal entries blend reflection on daily Bible readings with happenings in her life.

Campus Ministry has been offering versions of its so-called “daily life retreats” for more than a dozen years, usually during Lent and mid-fall. Michael Lank ’15, whose concentration in the Carroll School is management and leadership and who is also a theology major, is a two-time participant, with plans to join the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in New Orleans after graduation. He said that while he comes away from traditional, off-campus programs with a “retreat high that quickly fades,” this retreat, for him, is different. “You learn how to reflect with all the distractions,” he said. “That’s useful.” ■

End Notes

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From the Burns Library

Samuel Johnson (1709–84) devoted more than eight years to drafting the 42,773 definitions—with some 114,000 usage quotations—that constitute *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), which until the publication of the *Oxford English Dictionary* 135 years later remained the foremost English lexicon. Boston College owns eight early copies, including this two-volume (16 3/4 x 10 x 3 1/8 inches, apiece), leather-bound first edition. Dr. Johnson flagrantly worked his prejudices into definitions, including, famously: “Oats—a grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.”





Folk football in the streets of London, 1820.

THE OLD BALL GAME

By Mike Cronin

How Sundays and holy days ceased to be restful

BEGINNING IN THE MIDDLE AGES, HOLIDAYS SUCH AS Christmas, Shrove Tuesday, and Easter were often followed by festivals or fairs, during which physical competitions took place. These were not elaborate state-run spectacles like the Olympics but local affairs, open to all (men, that is), and often disorderly.

One key feature was the ball game. The Moors, who invaded Europe in the 8th century, brought with them various ball and stick sports, and these quickly proved popular, particularly in Spain and southern France, becoming staples of the holiday calendar. In France, for example, one can find many 9th-century references to ball games accompanying the rituals of the Easter celebration.

The spread of Catholicism across Europe holds further significance for sport because it heralded a common observance of the Sabbath as a day free of work. With spare time after church services, men across the continent began to play various sports, especially different forms of ball games and stick-and-ball games.

Neither Church nor state would entirely welcome the forms into which these pastimes developed. One ball game that achieved popularity in 16th-century Florence was calcio, which was played between Epiphany and Lent in the Piazza Santa Croce. Calcio was

reserved for the aristocratic youth, in two teams of 27. There were referees, and the game lays claim to the first written sporting rules, published in 1580. But the rules did not define how players could wrestle the ball from each other, and calcio became known for its violence. In 1574, the visiting Henry III of France observed such a contest and is said to have noted it was "too small to be a real war and too cruel to be a game."

The savagery of calcio was mirrored by ball games elsewhere in Europe, and particularly in Britain by folk football. This competition, which also took place on holy days, especially Shrove Tuesday, preceding Lent, involved a challenge between neighboring villages. Team size was unlimited, and the aim was to move a ball (it could also be an inflated bladder or a cask of ale) across the fields between villages to a specified location. Given the scope of the teams, which could run into the hundreds of players, the drink they consumed, the lack of rules, and the passions of local rivalries, injuries were common and death not unknown. Such was the mayhem surrounding the game that between the 13th and mid-17th century more than 30 local and royal laws were enacted to ban or at least limit the more violent aspects of the sport. It was also deemed

unsuitable within cities; London authorities outlawed the game in the 14th century, and Manchester did so in the 15th.

In fact, the entire history of folk football is one of attempts to curb its play. The Church in 14th-century England banned the game from its property and also forbade the clergy from taking part in contests. The story was the same in France, where the Church moved against the pastime and found an ally in the king, who considered the sight of mobs gathering to play a threat to the order of society, and potentially revolutionary. In England, the royalty shared the concern that the games were a danger to the public peace, but also worried that such undisciplined activities distracted men from preparing for their service to the nation. Various laws were established in England and Ireland during the 14th century that forbade citizens from playing football and directed them to spend more time with their bows and arrows in preparation for war.

Ball sports weren't confined to Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. A visitor to Greenland recounted watching the Inuits play a football-style game in 1586, and in colonial America the Native American game of *pahsaheman*—in which men and women compete to get a stuffed deerskin through a pair of goalposts—was

noted in 1610. Early arrivals to Australia observed the foot-and-ball game *mam grook* (from the indigenous *Djab Wurrung* phrase meaning "game ball") played by aboriginals, and in New Zealand the Maori people were witnessed playing *ki-o-rahi*, a precursor of rugby contested on a circular field.

In Europe, the Renaissance saw the introduction of many sports that showcased individual skill. The equestrian clashes of medieval tournaments morphed into horse racing; as firearms replaced the bow and arrow on the battlefield, archery was practiced purely for competition; royal tennis (often called court tennis, today), an outgrowth of a handball game played in the courtyards of French monasteries, spread across the continent; and golf, a stick and ball game first mentioned in the 14th century, appeared in Scotland, England, and the Netherlands, a well-mannered pastime pitting players against themselves. ■

Mike Cronin is academic director of Boston College-Ireland. His essay is drawn and adapted from his new book, *Sport: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2014). Copyright © Mike Cronin. The book may be ordered at a discount from the Boston College Bookstore via bc.edu/bcm.

Genealogy: Near Kempton, Pennsylvania

By James Najarian

The year that RFK and King were shot,
your father bought the last two hundred acres
from the youngest daughter of the German family
that tilled these hills for two fat centuries
They'd built a barn, plain red, (though when it rains,
the shadows of proud horses, names, and banners
push through the damp and show themselves), and added
a wooden summer kitchen to the house,
and earlier, the year of Gettysburg,
a set of rooms with foot-thick walls of rock.
Its core was laid by the Moravians
before the Revolutionary War,
they cleared the woods and tilled between the stumps,
put up a church—of which there is no trace,
not even a shallow, naked spot—and dug
a graveyard—now an unplowed bite of field.
The stones were carted off some years ago.
The Brethren whom they named remain in rows,
eroding as we speak, down to the ones
who died in combat with the Indians,
the Lenape, in the struggle for this land—

before those clans were flung beyond the ridges,
to Indiana, Kansas, and at last
to desiccated Oklahoma, dropping
the arrowheads that show like rocky shoots
at plowing, and the tonguing names of waters—
Saucony, Maxatawny, Tulpehocken.
A hundred people speak that language now.
What was this place before that time? The glaciers
palmed each valley, seam, and gully, leaving
the brittle tiers of greasy shale impressed
with the remains of vanished beasts and flowers.
Viewing them by the pond your father cut
is like perusing grimy photographs:
these are your ancestors, the trilobites—
your cousins, the bits of carapace and leaf
from when this farm took up the ocean floor.
But before that, where was this scrap of land?—
The universe could have been no more than
a pebble, cinder, or a grain of clay:
The black dot in your uncreated eye.

James Najarian is associate professor of English at Boston College and the 2015 recipient of the Meringoff Writing Award in Poetry from the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers.



SIDE EFFECTS

By Meaghan Leahy '15

Some families seem perfect. Others, past perfect

I DON'T REMEMBER HOW OLD I WAS WHEN I LEARNED what Risperdal was, but I remember how I felt when I saw her take it for the first time. Used to treat schizophrenia. Atypical antipsychotic. Dopamine antagonist. The good news? It calmed the irritability, or the doctor said it would, anyway. The bad news? Side effects include weight gain, metabolic problems, and maybe death. Also, despair, guilt, and hatred for a God who wasn't listening. But who's counting?

I WATCHED AS THE 15TH TOUR GROUP PASSED THROUGH Gasson Quad early this morning, and thought about how happy I was that my college application process was three years behind me. Sure, I haven't entirely figured out my future, but I have the luxury of doing so on the most beautiful campus with the most wonderful people. Could it get better than this?

The 16th group walked right next to my bench, and a family of four took up the rear. Well-dressed parents, listening intently to

the guide in front of them, followed by two whispering, giggling teenage girls with a clear resemblance to each other. Sisters.

I guess it could get better than this after all.

MY PARENTS PLANNED THAT WE WOULD BE 17 MONTHS apart. They planned that we would be close in age, and experience the same things at the same time. I told that to my friend Jenny once, and all she could say was, "Ew! They planned that?" (Sometimes Jenny would complain about her teacher Mrs. A. calling her by one of her older sisters' names.) Did Jenny think that every family was just like hers, had kids with cute rhyming names (Katie, Allie, Jenny, and Annie) who all went to the same school and had the same teachers year after year and grew together instead of apart?

It felt like everywhere I looked there was another perfect family with 2.5 neurotypical kids walking down the damn street with their perfect dog, turning into their perfect driveway, and going inside

their perfect house. The more kids they had, the more I compared myself to them, and the more I thought about my own family.

IN OUR HOME, IT'S JUST ME AND MY SISTER, MY SISTER and me. After my parents found out, they were too afraid to risk having any more children, and I don't blame them. At the time, it could have been anything—literally anything—that caused her condition. Was it her diet? Did my pregnant mother have too many mercury-laden foods? Was she a cold and heartless "refrigerator mom"? Was there mold behind the headboard, or did my dad give her a defective chromosome, now lodged somewhere in her genetic blueprints? Many theories have been discredited, like the MMR vaccine link and the gastrointestinal idea, but in the 1990s, no one knew that. No one really knew anything except that parents with one kid affected were more likely to have another.

So, I was born on January 24, 1993, and she was born on June 22, 1994, and we grew up together, albeit a little differently from the family down the block.

PAXIL IS AN ANTIDEPRESSANT DRUG OF THE SSRI VARIETY. Used to treat major depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, social anxiety, generalized anxiety disorder. Side effects include weight gain, increased risk of birth defects, higher rates of nausea and sleepiness, and also maybe probably definitely death. Who knows? I sure don't.

I HAVE HAPPY MEMORIES OF OUR OLD HOUSE AT 9 Salisbury, I really do. Our avenue was the best of the best. The Andersons (three kids: two boys, one girl), the DoYLES (four kids: all girls), and the Kavanaughs (two kids: one boy, one girl) all lived on my block, and if they were busy I could bike the three intersections to the Petrarcs (three kids: two boys, one girl) or the five to the Dohertys (three kids: all girls). Only 30 minutes away from midtown Manhattan, our tiny duplex nestled in the perfect suburban community made me feel like maybe something was perfect for us, too.

I remember filling up the big plastic pool and splashing around with the plastic ducks that we took from our Lucky Ducks game. My sister and I pretended to be characters on *Sesame Street*. I sang Ernie's "Rubber Duckie" song, and she laughed along. I never really knew if she was laughing at me or at the sky, but she was happy, so it was okay. I remember every time Mommy came to tuck us into bed, I would wait until I heard her feet glide back down the stairs and, once she was gone, I would set up all our stuffed animals on the floor across from my bed and tell my sister to wake up. I performed the "Star-Spangled Banner" and the theme song from *Barney* and took a deep bow as she clapped for me, in awe of my amazing singing voice.

I remember pushing each other on the swing set that Daddy put together and having secret spy missions under the picnic table. She was always the silent spy, and I was the handler, chatty and full of information.

I have a few unhappy memories, but I try not to dwell on them. I remember when her therapist's voice soared up the stairs almost as fast as Daddy went running down when he heard, "Joe! JOE!

Come down here!!!!" Mommy was right behind him and then all of a sudden she was back in the kitchen, grabbing at the phone. As she called 911, I learned that watching someone you love lose control over her body was similar to being strapped into a thrill ride. At Rye Playland, the High Flyer swings you back and forth in a giant pendulum, and brings you higher and higher until you start flying around in full circles. The Grand Mal Seizure Machine swings you back and forth from confusion to fear, spiraling you into utter panic until the ambulance arrives.

I remember when Daddy went into work on Tuesday and didn't come back until Sunday. Something had happened in Manhattan, my mom said, and he was staying at the firehouse. I had this habit of falling asleep on the extra mattress next to my Daddy's side of the bed, because I liked to hold his hand and play the Initial Game as I drifted into dreamland. To combat the loneliness of his absence, I slept in my sister's bed every night until he came home. I don't know if she knew what I knew—she couldn't tell me if she understood what the news was saying—but she hugged me back as we lay in bed crying.

I remember when I yelled at my mom four years later, asking why no one cared about what I wanted, and why I had to leave my school and friends. Why did we have to move to another town just because there was a better program and better busing for my sister? I also remember yelling at my sister for a different reason, when I was much, much younger. She had taken my favorite Barbie, and wouldn't give it back. I pulled and pulled, and even smacked her, but her yelling was louder and her thrashing was bigger, so Daddy said it was hers now.

I was full of resentment as a kid, but I also loved her. I was mad that I didn't have a real sister, like everyone else seemed to. I was mad that I never got to do what I wanted, or so I thought, because she would be upset. I was mad that she didn't build blanket forts with me or look me in the eye. She usually shied away from my hugs and wouldn't stop stealing my favorite VHS tapes in order to stack them, one on top of the other. But at the same time, she was the only sister I had. Sometimes watching *Ghostwriter* together wasn't that bad. It was even kind of fun, having the same favorite TV show and laughing at the same jokes. It was like we had something in common, something other than our genetics and last name. We had a thing, a bond. Jenny and Annie liked watching *Bill Nye the Science Guy*, and we liked watching the *Ghostwriter* gang solve the latest mystery. Maybe one day they could solve my sister for me.

TOPAMAX IS AN ANTICONVULSANT (antiepilepsy) DRUG. In late 2012, the Food and Drug Administration approved the drug in combination with phentermine for weight loss, probably because it had previously been used off-label for this purpose. People were voluntarily subjecting themselves to the "very common, >10% chance" side effects of dizziness, paraesthesia, somnolence, nausea, diarrhea, fatigue, nasopharyngitis, and depression, to drop their unwanted pounds. I hated those people.

BY THE TIME I REACHED MIDDLE SCHOOL, I GREW OUT OF my resentment, but it wasn't all peachy-keen over in the Leahy house. After we moved 1.1 miles to our new home, I got my own room. It was cool, I guess—I had privacy and the newfound ability

to structure my night around my own needs, not around my sister's bedtime. But in another way, it completely cut out the little time I spent with her after I started growing up. I no longer held sold-out shows of the Backstreet Boys' latest album or sang the national anthem to a crowd of plush and one human. I hung out with my "real" friends and I stopped paying attention to her, unless my mom started crying. My relationship with my sister obviously left something to be desired, but I couldn't put my finger on exactly what that "something" was—bonding time? understanding? love? patience?—nor did I feel like giving it. And she physically couldn't, so that's where it stayed. Stagnant and devastating to my mother, who had planned to have two best friends, 17 months apart.

But it's not like I didn't care about her. We finally went to the same school, and I stepped into my long-awaited role of Cool Older Sister Who Already Knows Her Way Around the Hallways. I told all my new friends that I had a sibling in the self-contained

So, I was born on January 24, 1993, and
she was born on June 22, 1994, and we grew
up together, albeit a little differently from
the family down the block.

classroom right off the main hallway, and they should say hi to her or help her open her locker if she was struggling.

One day, from the music wing, I heard her voice. Screaming. The class stopped singing to look at the door, and Abercrombie-clad 13-year-olds started to echo her self-inflicted agony in whispered shrieks and fainting movements. I took one look at their stupid faces red from laughing hard, and I bolted out of my seat. I had one foot out the door before I remembered to turn back and explain to the teacher that she was mine (not theirs, not theirs to ridicule). She was my sister and they were making fun of her and I needed to leave right now.

By the time I got to her classroom, she was already in the nurse's office, waiting for my dad to come and get her. I waited, too.

A few more episodes like that, and we stopped going to school together.

SOMETIMES THINGS HAVE TO GET WORSE BEFORE THEY can get better, and man, they sure got worse. Before I moved on to our local high school, my sister enrolled in a special school for kids just like her. She screamed until her throat was so raw she couldn't say a word. She rubbed at the skin under her eyes and on the bridge of her nose until it bled in a steady stream down her face, unable to dot and scab and heal because she would just go at it, again and again. She lost about 30 pounds because her latest thing was essentially doing crunches while sitting upright on the couch. We tried a different medication and the symptoms abated, only to be replaced by new ones—repeated shaking of the head, eye movements, repetitive counting and conversation.

But the better outcomes were increased eye contact (they're the windows to your soul, I've heard, but I had never seen how blue

hers were until my 16th birthday) and improved speech ability. We worked from scripted responses—if you asked her how her day was, the answer would always be, "It was good," regardless of how it actually was—but we were able to have an almost-normal conversation. I would wait for her bus and ask what she did that day. The whole family gathered around the coffee table and listened. It was right out of a sitcom, except the same episode aired every day.

Best of all, I grew up. I got over the resentment, the needing-to-fit-in-at-school. I'm not saying our relationship was perfect—or is, for that matter—but I realized that she had thoughts and feelings, too. One December afternoon, she got off the bus crying. I asked what was wrong, she said, "It was good," and kept silently crying until Mom came home with pizza for dinner. I still don't know how her day went, or what made her so sad—and I never will.

Our experiences thus far were uniquely intertwined yet distanced: So many things happened only because we both lived in the same place, but we weren't living and learning and loving and losing the same way that freakin' Jenny and her siblings were. My own feelings weren't insignificant; I was allowed to feel neglected, angry, and guilty. I was allowed to feel pissed at God for not giving her diagnosis to me, and I was allowed to simultaneously feel just a tiny bit relieved that it wasn't me. But everything I was feeling, I'm sure she was feeling to the nth degree. That's what all those tantrums were: anger, rage, sadness, frustration, excitement, happiness, love—all simmering under the surface until they boiled over.

I went to the Spring Fling and worked on the student-run literary magazine. I excelled in my honors classes and took more AP exams than I'd like to count. (More importantly, I leaned against my locker as the boy from first period World History flirted with me.) The rest of my high school career was par for the course, maybe not glamorous, but well above average.

But I'll always wish she was standing next to me in the pre-prom pictures. I'll always wish she started lifeguarding with me when she was old enough. Once, before I had my real license, my parents were with some friends for a much-needed night out, so I told her to get in the passenger side of our 2000 silver Toyota Camry and strap in. We drove around the block, like 20 times, with the windows down. We blasted Katy Perry's "Firework," and for a second I felt like this is how it would have been if, you know, we had been like every other family in this too-small town. I made her promise not to tell, even though I knew she couldn't. I guess I did it because it felt like something normal kids would do.

CLONAZEPAM IS A BENZODIAZEPINE DRUG HAVING ANXIOLYTIC, anticonvulsant, muscle relaxant, sedative, and hypnotic properties. Muscle relaxant? Sounds like a good idea. But the commonly associated drowsiness, motor impairment, personality changes, and behavioral disturbances don't seem great. And doesn't the induction of seizures or increased frequency of seizures directly contradict what we're trying to do here?

FRESHMAN YEAR, I WENT OVER TO THE LAW SCHOOL TO get some paperwork notarized. On April 24, 2012, I became the

standby guardian for my sister. I became the first successor to the modest trust my parents have set up for her future, slowly saving their civil servant wages for the day they can no longer provide for her. I'm one tragic accident away from losing my parents and becoming responsible for another human life.

On a lighter note, I actually have my license now, so no more definitely-illegal activities for us. But there was this one time last summer when my sister and I went to the mall and picked out earrings, then got a slice or two or definitely five at our favorite pizza joint, and walked around town with Starbucks cups and big sunglasses on. When we got back home, we scooped ice cream and had a dance party around the kitchen in our pajamas before watching *Good Luck Charlie* on the Disney Channel and going to bed. Her new therapist is working with her on emailing. The other day she wrote to me, listing the things she did that day (went to the gym with Daddy, going to a special dance). I almost responded that I was going out to get ice cream with my roommates and my boyfriend, but then I remembered that she won't ever have those relationships, so I said I was studying for a test instead. When I came home for spring break, then-boyfriend in tow, she came up to me—unprompted—and said, “I’m glad that Meaghan’s back! Meaghan’s home!” I introduced her to him, trying not to cry.

I WROTE MY COMMON APP ESSAY ON WHAT I LEARNED from her. On what I learned from watching over the years as she took more medication than should ever be allowed for a vibrant, kind, and naturally athletic young woman. Catapres, Risperdal, Haldol for the tics. Paxil, Serquel, Celexa, Zoloft, Neurontin for the autism symptoms. Klonopin, Topamax, Zyprexa all under her latest doctor. These were the bottles I became familiar with over the years. I watched as each new medication was introduced, then taken away, only to be replaced by another. She was never on all 11 drugs at once, but always one or two at any given time in her life. She recently tried Clonidine and Clonazepam for the tics (they’ve gotten way, way worse; that moment where she stopped shaking long enough to meet my boyfriend is a rare occurrence these days), before my dad decided he didn’t want his little girl to be stuck on the couch in an over-medicated haze. He would rather watch as she shakes her head back and forth and listen as she repeatedly asks to wipe her hands, than see her without the energy to laugh and play. Without the energy to live.

Something I’ve always found to be intriguing is that even with all of these medications, we never needed one of those weekly pill organizers in the house. No plastic container with SMTWTFs emblazoned on the front, implying that the neurologically disordered are too stupid to know how many to take and when. Nope, Kelly is a smart chick. She knows to take one Zyprexa and one Celexa every night before bed and if I forget to get them for her, she will come and interrupt my binge Netflix-watching session to tell me the exact dosage. I guess Jack Bauer can wait. This is the everyday in our house, the Sunday-Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday-Friday-Saturday.

I got into Boston College, I believe, not because of my grades and extracurriculars (although they had something to do with it), but because of Kelly Ann Leahy. The admission officers read my essay and they couldn’t not fall in love with the young woman I

told them about. The strong autistic girl who every day battles everything that holds her back—her sister, the world, her own disorder—and consistently comes out on top. I bet they wanted to accept her instead of me, but settled for the lesser option.

MY COMMON APP ESSAY EXPLAINS HOW KELLY CHANGED me, how my resentment of her diagnosis grew into love for her personality. But reading over it again, I feel like a fraud. There’s a small voice in my head that never stopped resenting the picturesque families down the block—never stopped comparing us to them. Back in high school, I accepted my sister for who she was, sure, but I never accepted my family for who we were. I polished my experience for the admission counselors. They didn’t see the things I did to make my sister’s life harder—I ignored her, I neglected her, I yelled at her—and they didn’t see what I did to try to make up for that either. They didn’t see the swimming lessons or the ice cream cones, they didn’t see the joyride or the webcam selfies framed in her room. They didn’t see my confusion.

I told them that I had come to terms with the fact that the cultural idea of normal was never going to be mine. But that was a lie. I’m still struggling with it, every day.

IT’S 2015 NOW, AND KELLY’S 21ST BIRTHDAY IS IN A FEW months. All this time, no one outside of me, my family, and the recipients of my Common App has ever read what 17-year-old me wrote in 2010 about my younger sister, my role model. But I think everyone should, so here it is. When you’re done, call your siblings and tell them you love them, and, most importantly, that you’re thankful to be able to tell them.

I am certainly not the only person in the world with a sibling. A friend from school is one of 14 kids and another is one of eight. In fact, most of my friends come from larger families than my own, but I like to think that living with my sister is a little different than having 13 siblings.

My sister Kelly Ann is a 16-year-old girl with autism and Tourette syndrome, and she has been this way for most of her young life. Diagnosed with autism at age two and Tourette syndrome around age 11, my sister has had to deal with more obstacles than most kids her age, as well as most adults I know. To be honest, one of the challenges she has had to deal with is me. My parents love to tell the story about the day they brought Kelly home from the hospital and I stormed out of the living room upon seeing a new baby. As a child, all I saw was that if Kelly threw a tantrum she would get her way, and I’d be forced to watch Barney instead of Justice League. Sometimes I would even yell at her for repeating gibberish over and over. Don’t misunderstand me, I love her, but I think I always resented her for being the younger, prettier sister who ultimately got everything she wanted.

It wasn’t until I grew up and came to terms with Kelly’s challenges that I realized she didn’t have it as easy as I thought she did. First, autism hinders social interaction and communication. The tantrums she threw were not to get her way like I once thought; they were actually to express the feelings she couldn’t tell us verbally. And all the times I ran out of the house to hang out with my friends? Kelly was never able to have that escape. I had taken the autism for granted because it had been there my whole life, but it wasn’t until Tourette syndrome manifested in the summer of 2005 that I sat up and took notice. It was at this point that

my little sister taught me more than I ever could have learned from a chalkboard.

Endurance. Every day, Kelly has hundreds to thousands of tics due to the Tourette's. Many of them are self-injurious, such as when she rubs her face so much that the skin breaks, and when she screams repeatedly until her throat goes raw. Regardless of how physically taxing her tics are, Kelly always seems to continue through her day as if nothing is wrong. Before this realization, I would call it quits if I were a little tired while running or too cold while swimming. Now, even when I am very tired or cold, I've realized that I can't just stop when things get tough. My sister has taught me to finish what I start.

Patience. Since being diagnosed with autism, Kelly has had a string of different therapists come to our house in order to teach her things the rest of us do naturally. Using the bathroom independently, writing legibly, and reading out loud are things that took her years to learn, and these skills didn't come easily. When the Tourette syndrome developed, a giant wrench was thrown into our lives and Kelly had to relearn many of the skills she had previously acquired. Through this process, Kelly has taught me that patience truly is a virtue. If she gave up every time she became frustrated, she never would have made it past where she was at age three. My sister has taught me to be patient with her, myself, and others.

Innocence. Kelly still quotes her old Barney tapes and watches Caillou on TV. Although this could be considered immature to an outsider, I actually find it refreshing. After coming home from a day at high school where everyone seems to be growing up too fast, spending time with my sister in a manner reminiscent to our younger years is time I value. While our topics of conversation are not typical of two teenage sisters, they are easy and they are honest. Her influence has kept a part of me young at heart, even though the rest of me has to grow up. With

Kelly's help, I like to think I'm maintaining my innocence while still being informed, and enjoying the present moments of my life.

Independence. My sister will never be fully independent, and as I get older this fact starts to sink in more. I'm never going to have Kelly drive to pick me up from the airport, be the maid of honor at her wedding, or be the godmother to her children. She will live with my parents until they're gone, and then I'd like to think she'll live with me. Because of this, I am faced with the challenge of thinking forward—considering both her needs as well as my own. I am forced to think about a time in the future when the outcome of both of our lives will be my responsibility. Because of this, my sister has taught me a greater, more important form of independence. The 16 years of her life have been filled with ridicule, whether it is laughing children or adults who can't seem to stop staring. Instead of crumbling at the will of these ignorant people, Kelly continues to work to overcome her challenges. Thanks to her example, I've stopped being so self-conscious and I'm happy with who I am. This allows me to focus on how I can continue to work on my own goals without being sidetracked by superficiality.

Kelly has influenced my life in ways that can't be paralleled. My childhood has been different because of her influence, and I expect the same of my adulthood. Kelly's impact on my endurance, patience, innocence, and independence (among other qualities) has helped me grow into the person I am today. I know her continued influence will help me develop into the person I want to be: a responsible student, a good friend, and a devoted sister. ■

Meaghan Leahy '15 is a communication and English major and will enter the Columbia Publishing Course in June. Her essay is drawn and adapted from an article published in the spring 2015 issue of the *Medical Humanities Journal of Boston College*. The names of some individuals have been changed in the writing.

Carrying the conversation on health beyond borders

The new, student-run *Medical Humanities Journal of Boston College* was born of the interdisciplinary medical humanities minor that started at the University in fall 2013 under the direction of English professor Amy Boesky. The journal's mission: "to examine critically and represent creatively ideas of health, illness, caregiving, and medicine." Volume 1, issue 1, appeared this spring, with editor-in-chief Christopher Kabacinski '16 (an English major) and managing editor Emilee Herringshaw '16 (biochemistry) leading an editorial, web, design, business, and publicity staff of 21 undergraduates. (The Institute for the Liberal Arts funded the printing.) The 89-page issue, a collection of 18 works, features undergraduate poetry (including "Water Birth," by English major Sophia Valesca Gorgens '15); photography, from senior nursing student



Kelly DiStefano's 2013 research trip to a maternal healthcare clinic in Nepal; artwork, by biology major Katherine Carsky '16; first-person accounts (e.g., senior biology major Maria Asdourian's recollections of her Alzheimer's-afflicted grandfather); and research ("Just the Treatment We Need: A Clinical Examination of the Global Pharmaceutical System," by international studies major Lucas Allen '16). A guest folio of contributions by four recent alumni includes an essay by Ilyssa Tamler '14 on her work as a clinical assistant at a medical center for abandoned and orphaned children in Morelos, Mexico, and a medical and social history of hand sanitizer by Sahil Angelo '14, a program coordinator and research assistant at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. The journal may be read online, at mhjbc.org.

UNITED WE STAND

By Dave Denison

Extending corporate personhood

Since arriving at Boston College Law School in 1995, professor Kent Greenfield has brought a distinctive perspective to bear on his courses in corporate law and on his extensive writing about corporate governance. "I've always been the lefty in the room in the corporate law field," he said during a conversation at his fifth-floor office in the Newton Campus's Stuart House. In his 2006 book, *The Failure of Corporate Law: Fundamental Laws and Progressive Possibilities* (University of Chicago Press), he laid out his position as a critic of the status quo. Yet Greenfield has also put himself at odds with many on the left, most recently in a January/February 2015 *Washington Monthly* article provocatively titled "Let Us Now Praise Corporate Persons." The gist: Mitt Romney was right to say, "Corporations are people."

It was the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 *Citizens United* ruling, allowing corporations to spend unlimited money to influence elections, that brought him to this point, Greenfield explained. Until that ruling, he assumed his longtime interest in corporate law ran on a separate track from his equally strong interest in constitutional law. The Court's decision forced the question of corporate constitutional rights—in this case, the right to free speech. Greenfield began to see his two fields overlapping.

Almost immediately after *Citizens United*, efforts got underway to amend the Constitution, including a campaign by the Boston-based Free Speech for People to push a "People's Rights Amendment" stating that the rights protected in that document are for "natural persons" only. Greenfield, however, began thinking back to conversations he'd had at Harvard Law School with Victor Brudney, a mentor there who is now professor emeritus in corporate finance law. "I remember him telling me, over 15 years ago, [corporate] personhood is neither here nor there," Greenfield said. Brudney meant that the personhood debate doesn't clarify the issue—granting some constitutional protections to corporations doesn't mean they are actual "persons," nor that those rights should be as extensive as they are for individuals. (Additionally, some groups that aren't persons—such as unions—may have free speech rights, while some persons—high school students, prisoners, members of the military—have only limited speech rights.)

"It can't be the case that corporations should have no constitutional rights," Greenfield continued. For one thing, "there are all kinds of different corporations. Boston College is a corporation, the New York Times is a corporation." Suppose, he said, a state legislature wanted to ban private colleges from teaching Islamic law. Without constitutional protections, such colleges—and nonprofits and businesses—could be subject to "whatever regulatory whim some local jurisdiction would want to impose."

Greenfield says he is deeply sympathetic with arguments on the left that democracy is imperiled by too much corporate power and too little accountability. But the remedy isn't a constitutional amendment, he says. Instead, he argues for a sort of legal jujitsu: If the Supreme Court insists that corporations be treated like citizens under the law then let us require them to act like citizens, with an interest in the polity. Corporations don't report for jury duty or register for the draft, but shouldn't they have obligations too? The problem is—this is that "fundamental flaw" mentioned in his book title—courts (and corporations) mostly reject the claim that corporations have wider legal responsibilities. Greenfield credits the landmark Michigan Supreme Court case *Dodge v. Ford* (1919) with articulating what became the guiding principle in corporate law: "A business corporation is organized and carried on primarily for the profit of the stockholders."

In a 2014 *Seattle University Law Review* article, Greenfield contends that "the interests of shareholders at best only align haphazardly with the interests of other stakeholders and of society as a whole, and at worst align not at all." He draws attention to a European-style structuring of corporate governing boards to include workers, other stakeholders, and "the public interest" in decision-making. "My point is that we in the United States have this big blind spot," he said. "When we think of the legal obligations of corporations we say that they can't take into account the People."

Greenfield is working on a book for Yale University Press that will "bridge these two worlds of corporate law and constitutional law"—and that will propose answers to the question, "What is the best role of corporations in the public space?" ■





Kane, in her office/examining room at the women's facility.

Captive care

By Zachary Jason

Prison nurse practitioner
Kimberly Kane, MS'11

Each morning, Kimberly Kane enters a four-story brick building and passes through seven locked bulletproof doors. On door two is a sign: "No weapons beyond this point." After between doors three and four notes the current security level—green, yellow, or red. Up a flight of concrete stairs and to the left Kane enters Room 335, her nine-foot-by-12-foot, combined office and exam room at the Gloria McDonald women's medium security prison in Cranston, Rhode Island.

When Kane, a nurse practitioner, was hired as the jail's first full-time medical provider in 2011, there was no exam room, and inmates received care only if they filed sick complaints; treatment was provided on site by two doctors who visited the prison four hours a week (nurses handled triage for them). Now, each convict sees Kane within 14 days of incarceration and receives an annual physical exam during her month of birth. Sick complaints have dropped from 80 a week to fewer than 10. Since arriving, Kane has ensured that pregnant women—generally, 10 percent of the inmate population of 150—receive extra vitamins and snacks, and that they are no longer shackled when taken to the hospital for delivery. (After Kane's article "Advocating for Pregnant Women

in Prison" was published in the July 2013 *Journal of Forensic Nursing*, seven states outlawed restraints on inmates in labor, raising the total to 21.) Expectant mothers receive ultrasounds in a second new exam room. And postpartum prisoners are now permitted to pump breast milk.

Kane's office window overlooks a dirt field for K9 training, and beyond that the men's intake and maximum security prisons, where she sees patients three times a week. She says that because men tend to adapt to institutionalization more readily than women, she can administer physicals to three men in the time it takes her to see one woman. "Everything else here is very regimented," Kane says. "I have a very unhurried demeanor." To build trust, she invites female patients to sit across from her at her desk for a 20-or-so-minute conversation about their personal concerns before discussing medical needs.

From 2002 to 2011, Kane, the mother of four children, was a registered nurse at Massachusetts General Hospital. Her work there with patients—immigrants, the homeless—who lacked primary physicians sparked an interest in the underserved. She finds prison work "less stressful," in some ways. For one thing, most prisoners aren't acutely ill. "They also live right here."

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See the impact on p. 78.

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